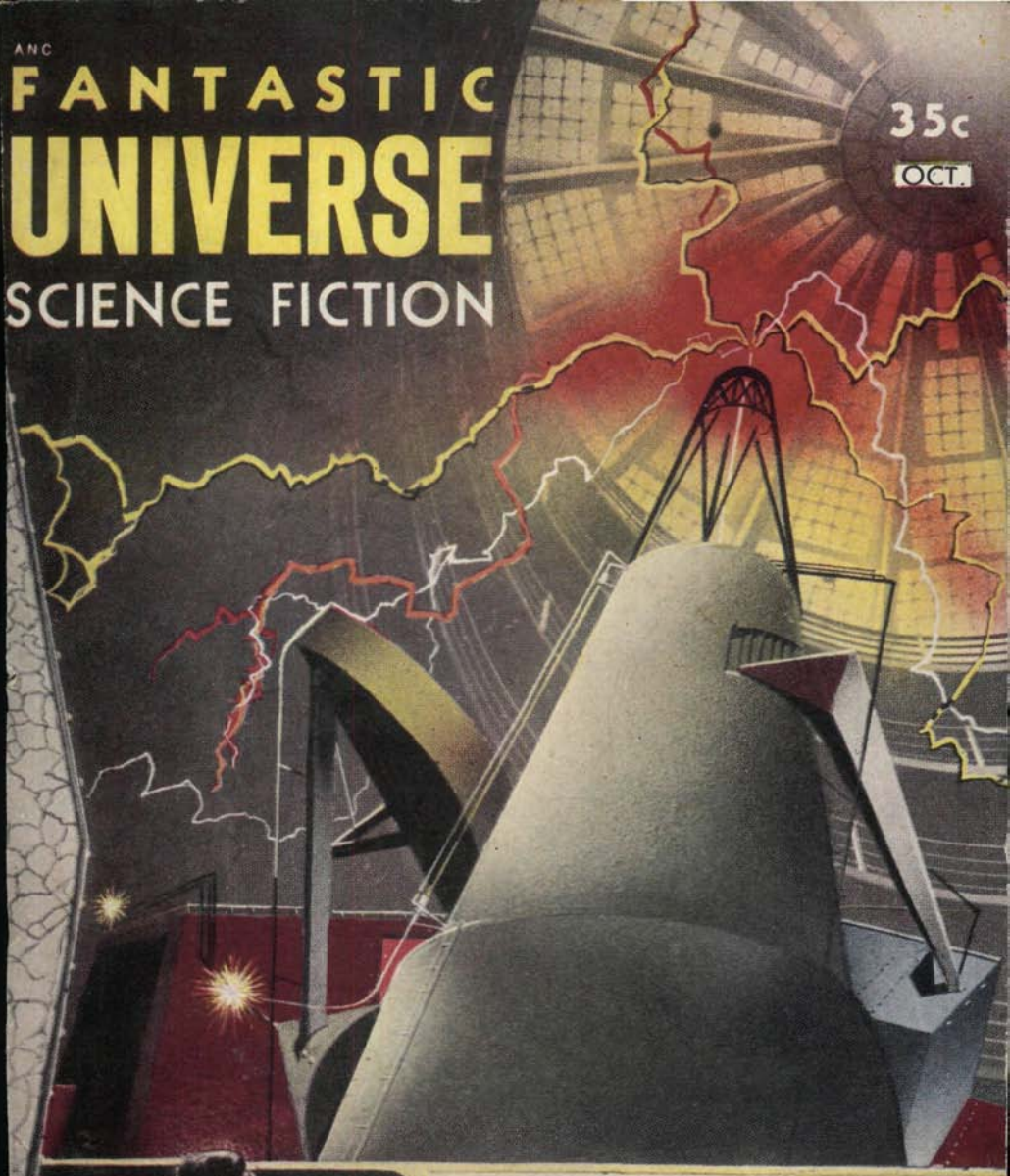
ANC

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

35c

OCT.



ROBERT SHECKLEY • PHILIP K. DICK
EVAN HUNTER • FRANK BELKNAP LONG
PHILIP JOSE FARMER • GEORGE WHITLEY
NORMAN ARKAWY • CHARLES E. FRITCH

ALL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE BRAND NEW

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

What will the rocket ship of the future be like? How will it be shaped? How will it be piloted and controlled, how fueled and insulated against the thousand degree temperatures engendered by air friction, and against the absolute cold of space?

There is no easy answer to any of these questions. Of one thing only can we be sure. The rocket ship that will dare the gulfs between the planets will be built of steel or some even more obdurate metal, since aluminum loses most of its strength when speeds of over half a mile a second have been attained. Only a few metals could stand up under the air friction heating to which they would be subjected on leaving and entering a planetary atmosphere.

When the metal problem has been settled, the other problems will begin to burgeon in all of their bewildering complexity. How should the ship be piloted? By an automatic brain with thousands of vacuum tubes, intricate relays, resistances and photo-electric signaling devices or by a single man with the most complex and tremendous of all guiding mechanisms within the narrow confines of his skull—the human brain?

The answer may well lie between both of these extremes. In this month's prophetically imaginative cover illustration we see graphically portrayed the control compartment of an interplanetary rocket ship with its multi-instrumental guidance system blazing with light and fire.

At the controls sits a puny man, his hands playing over an intricate electronic maze of navigational correction devices.

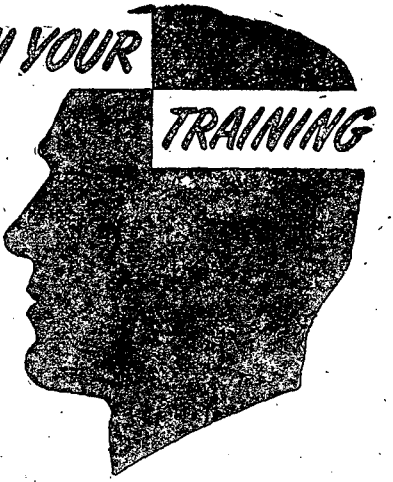
Without the prodigious, light-flashing web of mechanical power which looms before him the pilot would have no speed, altitude, planetary curvature, or orbital readings to correct, no hope of guiding the ship to Venus, or Mars. But without the web of adaptive, resourceful intelligence within his skull there would have been no ship to guide at all, no dream to light man's path as if with a proximity fuse at the bright beginning of his long, valiant journey from Earth to the stars.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For real job security...

FILL THE GAPS IN YOUR TRAINING



THE pressure is mounting. Competition for jobs is growing fast. Business and industry are tightening up. Every man or woman holding a good job is now, in effect, *"on probation."*

Are there "weak spots" in your training? Now's the time to get after them! Six months from now may be too late.

How can you *fill the gaps—quickly?* International Correspondence Schools can help you! There's no faster, surer way to get *exactly* the training you need!

You have 277 famous, spare-time I. C. S. Courses to choose from: trade, industrial engineering, office, executive, high school. Or you can arrange for "refresher" courses, advanced training or special instruction combining two or more specific business or technical subjects.

I. C. S. has the most complete line-up of job-related instruction you can find anywhere. Courses are tailored to fit *your* needs. This means you waste no time on subjects you can't use. You lose no time traveling back and forth to classes. You set your own schedule—no interference with business or social activities.

Find out for yourself how quickly, how thoroughly I. C. S. can fill the gaps in *your* training! No obligation. Just mark and mail the coupon!

2 FREE BOOKS

32-page, pocket-size gold mine of facts, "How to Succeed," *plus* catalog outlining opportunities in field that interests you!

For Real Job Security—Get an I. C. S. Diploma! **I. C. S., Scranton 9, Penna.**

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2914-B, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

(Partial list of 277 courses)

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW to SUCCEED" and the opportunity booklet about the field BEFORE which I have marked X:

ARCHITECTURE and BUILDING CONSTRUCTION
- ☐ Air Conditioning—Refrig.
- ☐ *Architecture*
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Building Maintenance
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Painting Contractor
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Reading Arch. Blueprints
- ☐ Steamfitting

ART
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ *Fashion Illustrating*
- ☐ Magazine Illustrating
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Sketching and Painting

AUTOMOTIVE
- ☐ *Auto Body Rebuilding*
- ☐ Auto Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto-Engine Tune Up
- ☐ Automobile Mechanic

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft & Engine Mechanic

BUSINESS
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Bookkeeping and Accounting
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Creative Salesmanship
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Letter-writing Improvement
- ☐ Managing Small Business
- ☐ Office Management
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ *Sales Management*
- ☐ Stenographic-Secretarial
- ☐ Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY
- ☐ Analytical Chemistry
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chem. Lab. Technician
- ☐ General Chemistry
- ☐ *Natural Gas Prod. & Trans.*
- ☐ Petroleum Engineering
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Construction Engineering
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Struct. Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ *Structural Engineering*
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

DRAFTING
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mine Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ *Ship Drafting*
- ☐ Structural Drafting

ELECTRICAL
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electrician ☐ Contracting
- ☐ Lineman

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ *Commercial*
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics

LEADERSHIP
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Leadership and Organization
- ☐ Personnel-Labor Relations

MECHANICAL AND SHOP
- ☐ Gas—Electric Welding
- ☐ Heat Treatment ☐ Metallurgy
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Machine Design-Drafting
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Quality Control
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Tool Design ☐ Toolmaking

RADIO, TELEVISION
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ *Practical Radio—TV Eng'r'ng*
- ☐ Radio and TV Servicing
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Television—Technician

RAILROAD
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Section Foreman

STEAM AND DIESEL POWER
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Diesel—Elec. ☐ Diesel Eng's
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Stationary Fireman
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering

TEXTILE
- ☐ Carding and Spinning
- ☐ Cotton, Rayon, Woolen Mfg.
- ☐ *Finishing and Dyeing*
- ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Textile Eng'r'g ☐ Throwing
- ☐ Warping and Weaving

MISCELLANEOUS
- ☐ Domestic Refrigeration
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Ocean Navigation
- ☐ Shipfitting
- ☐ Short Story Writing
- ☐ Telephony

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to P.M._____

Occupation_____

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada. . . . Special tuition rates to members of the U. S. Armed Forces.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

OCT. 1954
Vol. 2, No. 3

The Wrong Track 4
by George Whitley

Once a First Wife— 33
by Norman Arkawy

Souvenir 41
by Philip K. Dick

Dream Damsel 52
by Evan Hunter

Conquerors' Planet 60
by Robert Sheckley

The Wounded 69
by Philip José Farmer

Office Call 74
by Charles E. Fritch

My Past is Mine 82
by Gerda Rhoads

Strangers to Straba 90
by Carl Jacobi

True to Type 99
by Arthur T. Harris

Two Way Destiny 103
by Frank Belknap Long

The Nobles Are Coming 125
by Gene Cross

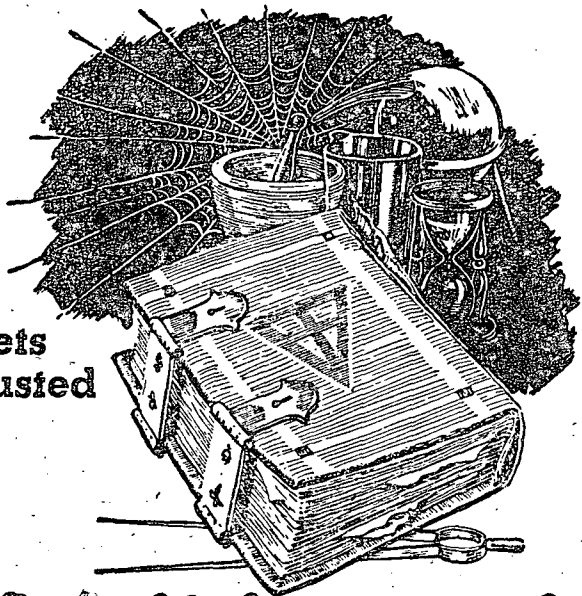
H. L. Herbert
President

Leo Margulies
Publisher
Editorial Director

Bert Lief
Cover Design

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, VOL. 2, NO. 3, published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscriptions 6 issues $2.00, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35c. Foreign postage extra. Entered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, New York. The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead.
Copyright, 1954, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. OCT. 1954. PRINTED IN U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Secrets entrusted to a few

The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

THIS FREE BOOK

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) an age-old brotherhood of learning, have preserved this secret wisdom in their archives for centuries. *They now invite you to share the practical helpfulness of their teachings.* Write today for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." Within its pages may lie a new life of opportunity for you. Address: Scribe

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe I. C. X.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California
Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life,* which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.
Name.....
Address.....
City.....

The Rosicrucians (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wrong track

by . . . George Whitley

It's unwise to board a train in a too fanciful mood. The *Drings* may be waiting for you—quite horribly on another time track!

MIND YOU, I don't claim to be equipped with a built-in magnetic compass or directional gyroscope, but I do have a good sense of direction. Most sailors have. It's a sixth sense of sorts, and a very useful one at that. It's the ability to steer a reasonably direct course back to ship after a night ashore in a strange port. A sort of homing instinct.

It is very rarely that mine lets me down. It did once, badly. Or did it? I'm still far from convinced. There's something odd about that stretch of line—so much so that if I ever use it again it will be after taking out a really heavy life insurance and after having filled my pockets with my Colt thirty-eight, my Mauser nine millimetre, and an ample supply of ammunition for each.

Meanwhile, Margaret and I return from Chancery Lane by Central Line, catching a Hounslow bound trolley at Shepherd's Bush . . .

The day it happened we had attended the Thursday night session at the White Horse, the

Both as a writer and a British seafaring man George Whitley has acquired a mellow liking for strange ports of call, and characters who never seem able to steer a straight course back to their ships. If their zigzagging takes them into other dimensions of space and time his delight knows no bounds, and his imagination soars—as it has in this memorable story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

London pub which is the regular meeting place for everybody in any way connected with fantasy or science fiction. We—Margaret and I, that is—didn't feel like drinking.

We had dinner with Arthur Clarke—and he's a teetotaller—in the small restaurant across the way from the White Horse and, after returning to the pub, refused to let ourselves become involved in a beer-and-bawdy-song session with Bertram Chandler and Peter Phillips.

We wanted to leave early as we wished to get up early the following morning. So, after having one glass of port each, we left the White Horse early and sober.

It was a fine night, crisp and with a touch of frost in the air. The full moon lent a spurious glamour to the ugly, red-brick offices of the Prudential Insurance Company, and my wife and I quite enjoyed the short walk from Fetter Lane to the Chancery Lane subway station. There we had only a minute to wait for a train.

We changed at Holborn, from the Central Line to the West-bound Piccadilly Line. When, after having negotiated the various escalators and tunnels, we walked on to the platform, I looked at the indicator board. The next train, I saw, was going to be Hounslow and not, as so often is the case, Uxbridge or Rayner's Lane.

"Not long to wait," I said. Then, seeing that Margaret was wandering off to the right, I asked, "Where do you think *you're* going?"

"We want the *front* of the train," she explained patiently. "Saves a long walk at Hounslow Central."

"I know. But the way you're going you'll be right for the *rear* of the train."

"No. The front," she said firmly, "is *this* direction."

"The rear. *This* way for the front." I took her arm, pulled her toward the opposite direction along the platform. "You know, it always seems to me that the train comes into this station the wrong way—east-bound instead of west-bound. I have to force myself to go to the right end of the platform. But I didn't know that anybody else ever had the same feeling."

"I always have it," she said.

"I'm relieved to hear it. It was beginning to get me more than a little worried. Every time I come home this way the train, for me, seems headed in the wrong direction. Then, usually one or two stations either before or after Hammersmith, there's a sort of . . . well, shift . . . and everything's all right."

"It's the same with me," she admitted.

"Have you ever tried to force the change?" I asked.

"Yes. But it doesn't work. And then, suddenly, when I'm not thinking about it, I realize that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the train is traveling the right way."

"It could be," I said, "like that diagram that's used to show you if you're an introvert or an extravert. You know, the drawing of a skeleton cube which when you first look at it it seems to be a certain way, then there's a sudden shift of perspective and you're looking at it from an entirely different angle. For fun, to amuse ourselves on this trip, let's try to *will* the change, and see which one of us gets it first."

Before she could reply, there was a blast of air and the train came in to the station. The sliding doors opened. After disembarking passengers were out Margaret and I boarded the front coach, which was only half full, took our seats. The doors sighed shut, the lights flickered, the train got under way.

"It's *wrong,*" said my wife softly. "I have the definite feeling we're headed in the wrong direction. Why does such a feeling persist?"

"Wish I knew. I've thought of Klein flasks and Moebius strips . . ."

"What *would* happen," she asked, if a Moebius strip got built into a railway?"

The train stopped.

"Covent Garden," she said. "And still the wrong way."

"It's much too early for the change-over," I said.

A few passengers drifted out, a few drifted in. It was too early for the after-theatre traffic. The train started again.

"Are you concentrating?" asked Margaret.

"Yes. That Phillips' Rubber Soles ad always annoys me. That lush blonde is supposed to be tuning in a station on her TV, yet she's grinning into the camera or at the artist and she ought to be looking at the controls . . ."

"Never mind Rubber Soles and blondes. Concentrate!"

"All right. All right," I said.

"Leicester Square," she said.

The train stopped and, after the usual brief pause, started. We concentrated.

"Piccadilly Circus," said Margaret. "*Still* the wrong way. And you?"

"Still the wrong way."

Next time, I thought, *I must bring a pocket compass. Would it work? Too much steel? All sorts of electro-magnetic fields?* I tried to visualize the little instrument, the swinging, trembling needle. But I had already visualized the disadvantages attending its use all too well.

As, in my mind's eye, I tried to turn the case so that the North of the azimuth ring coincided with the North-seeking end of the needle, the needle pivoted too. It was like one of those nightmares in which you desperately strive to do something that stubbornly refuses to be done . . .

"Wake up," said Margaret.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I *am* awake," I assured her.

"You had your eyes shut."

"So what? I was concentrating, and now you've broken the spell." The train stopped again. "Green Park."

"Any moment now," she said.

"I'm afraid I can't agree. Hammersmith at the earliest."

"No. Any time now."

Once again I shut my eyes and visualized a compass. Not a pocket compass this time, but a full-size master gyro-compass. The noise of the train's passage became the whine of the motor generator, the clicking hunt and the ticking of the follow-up system. I saw, as clearly as though I had the instrument before me, the polished metal of the card, the divisions that were degrees of arc, dull black casing and shining working parts.

I could smell hot oil and hot metal. I imagined that I opened the inspection doors, checked the oil level in the bearing casings, looked at the spirit level. I could almost feel the warm, knurled metal at my fingers as I started to make the necessary adjustments for speed and latitude.

And Margaret's hand, which was lying loosely in mine, clenched suddenly, her fingernails bruising my palm.

"The *right* way!" I heard her gasp. "We've turned to the right way!"

"The right way," I agreed. The lubber's line of my imaginary compass stayed steady on 270°.

There had been, I was surprised to note, almost a shock, a feeling almost of nausea, when the change-over took place. It must have been our concentrating that did it, I told myself. It would be, I thought and said, a nice idea for a story. "What would you advise," I asked my wife, "Past, Future, or Parallel Time?"

"Knowing you," she said unkindly, "my guess is you'll work a switch to either the Martian Mail or the Lunar Ferry—unless you're in one of your bow and arrow moods, in which case you'll convert this carriage into a Viking long ship."

I laughed, feeling strangely exhilirated. "But here's an idea—suppose the Tories *had* got back in office in the first post-war election . . . The odds are that if that had happened we now would be living in a Communist state . . ."

"What's that got . . ."

"Yes, that's the way I'll do it . . . A Communist state, all very 1984. Now, concentrate again . . ."

A chill settled over the coach.

I knew vaguely that the seat on the other side of me from Margaret was now occupied. I glanced furtively at the little man who sat there—an inoffensive looking citizen he was, shabbily dressed and with his nose buried in a newspaper. I glanced at the paper as one does, saw that its title was *Der Anglischer Zeitung*. That in itself was not surprising; you can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

buy all manner of foreign language papers in London.

I allowed my eyes to stray from the newspaper to the advertisements on the opposite side of the carriage. Phillip's stupid blonde was no longer there to annoy me, and the Mona Lisaish model employed by Kent Hair Brushes was not there, either. But there was one poster from which a once familiar face stared at me—black cow-lick and black toothbrush moustache. The face was surrounded by much heavy, Gothic printing, and many swastikas. I stared at it blankly, feeling vaguely surprised.

Then I began to look at the people around us. Sitting across the aisle was an officer wearing a smart, black uniform, buttoned high to the throat. His cap was the sort of cap worn by chauffeurs of the very rich, the sort of cap that the average junior officer in the average passenger liner tries to make for himself by binding and distortion of the regulation article.

He didn't like us, this officer. The frozen glare that he was directing at us through his monacle would have been lethal could he have made it so. A hot resentment flooded through me. What right had this dressed-up foreigner to frown so at an Englishman and his wife discussing politics aboard a train in their own city?

But was it our own city any longer? There was the foreign newspaper, and there were the strange advertisements on the walls of the carriage . . .

"Dunkirk," I whispered. "Or the Battle of Britain . . . If we had lost there . . ."

Margaret clutched my hand painfully. "We have to get back!" she said urgently. "The children will be frantic."

I looked at her. Her hair and her lips were startlingly vivid against the pallor of her face.

The officer across the aisle barked something in an ugly, guttural voice. A man got up from his seat, made his way slowly towards us. He was undersized, ferrety, and his black leather jacket had been made for a bigger man. He held his left arm so that we could see the black swastika on the white brassard. His right hand was in his pocket.

He snarled, "Dirty Reds! Yer under arrest!"

"*Do* something!" whispered Margaret.

"Where's yer papers?" His right hand was out of his pocket now. It held an automatic pistol. He held it with the easy assurance of one to whom such weapons are mere working tools.

I shut my eyes, tried hard to visualize that gyro-compass again—the instrument that had got us into this trouble. Faintly, as from a great distance, I heard Margaret stalling, playing for time; heard her say in a placating voice, "We left them at home . . ."

The click that the pistol made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as it was cocked merged with the clicking hunt, the normal train noises merged, and once again the familiar machine was before me, almost tangible. Yes, it was easy to visualize the thing, but it wasn't easy to visualize it on the heading I wanted. *Let me get it back to 090°*, I prayed, *back to East, and we shall be back in our own world* . . . The lubber's line crept around the card, and steadied on 180° . . .

II

Once again came the change.

Once again came the twisting, the gut-wrenching sensation. Once again we opened our eyes and saw that we had a change of fellow passengers. And, although it took us some time to realize it, this time the change was evident to more senses than sight.

It took us, as I have said, some little time to make the discovery. At first we lay back in our seats, recovering from the fright we had suffered, blandly assuming that all was now well and that we were back in our own World, our present Time.

We opened our eyes sufficiently long to assure ourselves that neither the black-uniformed officer nor the man with the swastika brassard and the pistol were among those present. And, as far as I was concerned, the first attempt at rationalization of it all were already being made. I had slept. I had dreamed. And I had been the victim of a particularly striking and plausible nightmare.

And yet . . .

Get this straight, before I go any further. I like garlic. I like garlic used with discretion, and I like it when I'm eating it myself. But I don't like it when I haven't been eating it myself and everybody else has. Similarly, I don't mind Caporal cigarettes when I'm smoking them myself. But the smell in the carriage—composed, I should say, of one part Caporal cigarette smoke to two parts of garlic—was too much of a bad mixture. The motion of the coach was wrong, too. It was swaying more than it should have done. The rattle of steel wheels on steel seemed to come from overhead rather than from below.

I opened my eyes, looked cautiously around. As before—and it was not until later that we discovered what may be an explanation—nobody seemed to have noticed our arrival. They were a queer lot, our new fellow travellers, and . . . well, foreign. Not foreign as the Nazi officer had been, but with a foreignness that was, somehow, of Time as well as of Space, that called to mind old pictures of Leftish intellectuals and honest proletarians manning the barricades during the days of the Paris Commune.

Almost all of the men passengers were bearded, some with neat imperials, some with growths that were more luxuriant than tidy. Some wore black jackets and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

checked trousers, some brown velveteen, some were in working rig of blue denim. The dress of the women was not so outlandish, would have drawn scarcely a second look in any big city. There was something of Second Empire about them, something of New Look, and it made Margaret's tailored tweed costume look harsh and ungraceful by comparison.

I turned to her and said, "We shall have to try again, my dear. Something's gone wrong."

"Wait a little," she said. "I can't stand another Time shift just now. There's no immediate danger here—wherever 'here' is."

We lit cigarettes, listened to the conversation around us. It was in French, but spoken far too fast for us to understand. We looked at the chart of stations, saw that it was almost the same as the one in the train in which we had started our journey. Almost the same, but now Acton Town was called Actonville, and the line made its way to Piccadilly by way of Charing Cross and Place de Trafalgar.

"And that's wrong," I said to Margaret. "Trafalgar Square. It can't be. We're not going in that direction . . ."

"It is," she said. "Look . . ."

The train had stopped. We saw, across the platform, another city-bound train. This was, as I had already suspected, a mono-rail system with the coaches suspended from the overhead track. I was pointing this out to Margaret when a girl came in.

There was something familiar about her. She was small, dark, attractive. The feeling of recognition was like the haunting memory of a dream.

She looked at me, and her face lit up. She came straight to us, burst into a torrent of rapid French. All I could do was to shake my head and smile. Her face fell. She said in slow, precise English:

"I am sorry. I thought that you were a very dear friend of mine. But he is in Paris, on business." She sat beside me, carefully arranging her dress as she did so. She smiled again. "You are his double. He, like you, wears American clothes. You are American, of course."

I felt a spasm of foolish annoyance at having my Regent Street corduroys and tweed jacket described as American. Then saw the funny side of it. Besides, if Margaret and I could pass ourselves off as newly arrived tourists from across the Atlantic we should be able to learn a great deal more. But, first of all, there was an interesting point to be dealt with . . .

"This double of mine," I said to her. "We may run across him in Paris. What is his name?"

"Dunstan," she said. "Andre Dunstan. He has gone to attend the—the . . . how do you say it? . . . *Le Congress Astronautique Internationale*. You know, these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people who would fly us to the Moon in their foolish rockets. He is a friend of Monsieur Leclerc, President of the society that interests itself in these matters."

"Monsieur Leclerc," said Margaret slowly to me. And to the girl, "It is rather strange. We have a friend at home whose name is Clarke. And he, too, is a big noise in rocketry."

"I wonder if he, too, has a double," laughed the girl.

I thought it was time to change the subject and, at the same time, deal with another interesting point.

"We're strangers here," I said, "as you've already guessed. We're interested in your city. Tell me—what is there for tourists to see in Trafalgar Square?"

"You must see it!" she said. "The gardens, the fountains, the great statue of the Admiral with Neptune and the sea nymphs . . ."

"The Admiral?" I asked, looking as puzzled as I felt.

"Why, yes. The great Villeneuve."

"Somebody," I said to Margaret, "seems to have had his career ruined by redheads. Or, perhaps, one of his earlier wounds or illnesses was fatal . . ."

The girl said nothing, patiently waited until we had finished our private conversation. She was, I could see, a little hurt by our bad manners.

"Then," she went on, "you *must* visit the tomb of Robert Fulton . . ."

Fulton . . . The name had a familiar ring to it. Then I remembered that Robert Fulton was an American engineer in Napoleonic times, that his name was associated with early steamships and primitive submarines. And there was a story that I had heard or read somewhere, to the effect that he had offered his services to the Emperor but had met with a rebuff. Steamships and submarines at Trafalgar, and wearing the Tricolour . . . *That* would account for a lot of things.

Unconsciously I raised my hand—it is a characteristic gesture, they tell me—to stroke the beard that I no longer wear. The cuffs of shirt and jacket fell back from my wrists, revealing the dark birthmark with its unmistakable appearance, the similitude of a cat's head in profile.

The innocent, thoughtless action provoked a volley of rapid fire French from the little brunette. It was too fast for me to get it all, but I got enough to make me feel acutely uncomfortable. The gist of it was that I was her André, after all, that I had not gone to Paris to *le Congress Astronautique Internationale* but had remained in London to have an *affaire* with this lady dog of an American tourist woman.

"It is time," I said to Margaret, "that we weren't here."

I grabbed her hand tightly in mine, shut my eyes and thought hard, visualized the humming,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clicking compass, willed myself to see the lubber's line steady on 090°. I could see the machine plainly, in every detail, but the gyroscope was tilting, precessing, swinging wildly away from the true meridian. But the wrench came—the wrench, the feeling of nausea, of being turned inside out. I opened my eyes . . .

III

The French-speaking girl was gone. The car in which we rode was no longer the monorail coach, neither was it occupied either by Nazis or the men and women of our own World and Time. It ran, by the feel of it, on a double track, on wheels that were nearer square than round. The other people in the carriage—it was about half full—were all dressed alike, men and women, in drab, grey overalls. They stared at us, through us, with dull dead eyes.

The carriage was dirty and smelled of dry rot. The seats were hard wooden benches. Light was supplied by flickering oil lamps, the flames of which were dimly visible through sooted-over chimneys. The air was cold and damp.

"What have you done now?" demanded Margaret. *"What have you done?"*

I was asking myself the same question. I was telling myself that I had fled from what would have been no more than a temporary embarrassment, to a place of very real peril. I didn't know what the peril was, but I could feel it.

I tried to get us out of this extremely unpleasant situation by visualizing, yet again, the gyrocompass. But my thoughts were like feeble fish swimming weakly in some thick, gelid fluid. I couldn't concentrate!

We looked out through the window. There were no street lights, no house lights of suburbia, no illuminated clock towers of the factories along the Great West Road. Instead we saw fires. We saw dark, hulking masses like truncated pyramids and, belching from the tops of them, ruddy flames and billowing, black smoke. We saw a column of fire springing, apparently, from ground level, that must have been all of a thousand feet high. We saw what could have been rivers of flowing flame, and low clouds that glowed crimson.

I tore my eyes from the lurid landscape outside, stared at the chart of stations on the wall of our car, tried to gain from it some idea of our whereabouts both in Space and in the alternative Time.

The chart was not helpful. It was no more than a black line with circles marking the stations. And the stations had no names, merely letters and numbers. As I looked, the train stopped at C14. A few of the grey people got up, moved like automatons to the door which, I noticed, they had to open themselves.

After they got out six men and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three women entered. They could have been twins of those who had gone. With a jerk the train started again.

Margaret grasped my hand tightly. I felt better then, and it wasn't entirely due to the very real comfort I drew from her company. It was as though some of the weight on my mind had been lifted, some alien element of compulsion partially removed.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"I don't know. But it's a dangerous place—more dangerous than the others. I can feel it. It's like a weight, pressing . . ."

"Can't you get us out? Try, my dear—*try!*"

I tried. It was useless.

"I'll ask somebody where we are," said my wife suddenly. "It will do no harm . . ." But her voice held undertones of doubt. She turned to the drab, grey man who sat, staring vacantly at nothing, two places away from me. "Excuse me," she said. "We're strangers here. How far does this train go?"

There was no reply. He continued to stare ahead of him.

With my free hand I reached out and shook the man. "Where are we?" I asked. "Where is this train going?"

I had to shake him again before I got a reply. And when he spoke his voice was as dreary and characterless as his appearance. He said, "They will not approve. They say that we are not to waste our strength in foolish conversation."

"Who the hell are *they?*"

"They want to know who you are," he said, after a long pause.

"We're strangers here," I shouted. "From another Time."

"They will take the necessary action," he said.

It came to me, quite suddenly, that I didn't want to meet *them!*

I turned to stare out of the window, saw something large and lenticulate gleaming metallicly in the glare of the fires, pale lights showing from the ports along its rim, drifting slowly down from the overcast. The sight of it frightened me more than anything else had done, gave me some inkling as to who *they* might be. To hide my fear I said foolishly to the little grey man, "And you'd better tell *them* that they have saucers at the bottom of their garden."

He made no attempt to acknowledge the inanity. He said tonelessly, "They will be waiting for you at D3."

We looked at the chart. D3 was the end of the line. There were three more stops before we got there.

"Do try again!" Margaret was saying. "This is the worst of all! *They* aren't human! I know it! If they get us—there'll be no going back."

I looked at her. Even in her fear she was vivid and lovely. I thought of her looking like one of the drab, grey women in the coach, and I hated the thought. I caught

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both her hands in mine, felt—of this I am sure—power flow from her to me. I concentrated hard on the mental technique that had been getting us into and out of trouble ever since we had left the White Horse pub. Or, to be more exact, I *tried* to concentrate. It was impossible. Compellingly, monotonously, the words— *We will meet you at D3*—kept running through my brain to the exclusion of all else.

"I can't!" I gasped. "Some sort of hypnotic control has a grip on my mind."

The train shuddered to a halt.

"Quick!" cried Margaret. "Out here!"

"But . . ."

"Do you want to meet *them?*"

"No . . ."

"Then out!"

"All right, darling."

Nobody tried to stop us. The grey people just sat there, staring listlessly at the dirty floor of the carriage.

The door was stiff. As I wrestled with it I felt a nightmare panic. It came open at last with a squeal of ungreased hinges. Margaret and I stumbled out on to the platform just in time. We didn't bother to shut the door after us. We saw the locomotive, before it pulled out of sight around the bend, saw that it was steam powered, an ugly little runt of a thing with an almost spherical boiler and a long, crazily tilted smokestack. The train left a wake of ruddy sparks and sulphurous smoke, of gritty cinders.

IV

After it had gone we looked around us. We were standing on a wooden platform, the planks uneven and littered with dark mounds of rubbish. The only light was from glimmering, widely-spaced oil lamps. There was a persistent, bitter wind driving before it a persistent, cold rain. The glare of the fires reflected from the low clouds waxed and waned, alternated between a ruddy glow and an evil red-tinged darkness.

The voice in my mind reiterated the words: *We will meet you at D3.* But now it was just a faint murmur. I felt cold and frightened . . .

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"We take the next train back to town," she said. "Away from *them.* And we concentrate hard on returning to our own World, our own Time. And if we don't manage it—well, we stand a better chance of hiding out in a city than here."

"Hide out where?"

"There's bound to be an underground. The entire population of London can't be like those zombies on the train."

"How do we find the underground?"

"Dammit!" she exploded. "You *write* this kind of stuff! But you don't seem able to cope with it in real life!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I managed a grin that probably looked as sickly as it felt.

"When I write it," I said, "I have complete control over the situation. Besides—when things get out of hand I can always kill off all the characters . . ."

I was sorry immediately that I'd said it. It wasn't very funny, now. I caught her to me and held her tightly. "All right," I said. "We'll manage. Somehow. After all—they can't shoot us."

"Can't they?" she asked.

I looked at her, saw in the dim flickering light that she was trying to grin. "Won't, then," I said. "Not if *we* can help it."

"That's better," she said.

We started to walk slowly along the platform, away from the lights, away from the little shed that might have been a booking office, that might have been, that might have housed—anything.

Suddenly, ahead of us I saw what at first I took for two glowing coals on the platform. We stopped abruptly. At that moment the reflected glare from the sky brightened suddenly and I saw that the two glowing coals were the eyes of some creature. It was black, shapeless, and seemed to have too many legs. There was a familiar animal there, too, a cat. The cat was dead. The alien thing was feeding noisily on the cat's body.

I like cats. It was a silly thing to do, I know, but I lifted my foot, brought it down hard on the elongated head of the strange beast. I felt something give and crack. The screaming started then, a thin, high screech of pain and hate. The thing reared up until it stood all of five feet tall, and started for me. Ruddy light gleamed from its teeth and claws.

I didn't want to touch it with my bare hands even in self defense. I kicked out, desperately, frantically. My shoe grated on something hard, yet brittle. The screaming rose in intensity. I kicked again, this time with more judgment and less panic. The thing, for all its size, was amazingly light. It rose from the platform like a filthy rag blown by the wind, fell with a clatter of scales off the platform.

"Take this," Margaret was saying. "Take this."

She thrust a piece of wood into my hands—it had been pulled, she told me later, from the light, rickety fence at the end of the platform. I took it, jumped down onto the tracks. When I had finished using it the wood was splintered and dripping with a dark, sour-smelling fluid and the thin screaming sound had stopped.

"Is it—was it one of *them?*" asked Margaret.

"I don't think so. People who can build flying saucers aren't likely to be eating raw cats off dirty station platforms. One of *their* pets, perhaps."

"How do you know?"

"It was not a thing of this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world," I said slowly. "Of that I am certain."

"Here comes our train," she said, pointing to the locomotive slowly approaching under a cloud of steam and smoke and sparks. It rattled into the station slowly—too slowly, for I had seen movement under the dim light over the station entrance.

Then six men, walking in single file, trooped onto the platform. Only they weren't really men. Men don't normally walk with the jerkiness of a poorly manipulated marionette. Men don't have almost globular bodies, and they don't have more than four limbs. Men have necks, and these things had no necks. Their heads were hemispheres set on top of the spheres that were their bodies.

They did not seem to have seen us—yet. A cloud of smoke and steam from the ugly little engine blew across the platform and hid them from our view—and we from theirs.

We lost no time in climbing into the first carriage. It was empty. We sat on a hard, wooden bench near the door, ready for a fast getaway on the side away from the platform if necessary. But the train started after a succession of violent jerks that almost threw us to the floor of the coach.

We had the vehicle to ourselves, felt that it was safe to talk now.

"The other worlds made sense, of a sort," said Margaret, as soon as were under way. "But this one . . . How did it happen? How did it ever happen?"

"I can't do any better than guess," I said, "and my guess, for what it's worth, is this: Some time in the past—in Victorian days, perhaps—there was an invasion from Space. A successful one. In the other Worlds—in our World—it never happened. Some little thing intervened; we shall never know what it was. But it *might* have been something like this—just suppose that the crew of *Mary Celeste* were captured by a flying saucer. In *our* World one of them carried some sort of disease that wiped out the aliens or persuaded them that Earth was not a safe planet on which to make a landing . . .

"In *this* World that particular disease, or that particular carrier of the disease, was absent, and the aliens had all their specimens for leisurely study, for use as guinea pigs for testing weapons and techniques, before their invasion. They invaded. They conquered. And they have their supply as slave labor for whatever it is they are doing."

"But where are they from?"

"We shall find out," I said, "when we get to D3. We must get out at the next station. We must go back."

"Andrew!" she almost screamed. "What are you saying? What are you saying?"

I shook my head, trying to clear the thoughts from it that were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drifting in from outside. Icy fear contracted the muscles of my stomach.

"It wasn't I who said that," I muttered. "It was *they*. They know that we've got away, that we're wandering around loose. And they are on the look-out for us now, and all the—the slaves . . . There's a mind back there, a big, powerful mind and—and stupid. As stupid as those beings we saw back on the station. But keep hold of me. You're immune, somehow. As long as we keep physical contact I share your immunity."

"How do you know all this? Are you making it up?"

"I wish I were. But when it almost had me just now—that mind, or *their* mind was in mine . . . I don't know how else to explain it . . ."

"I felt something too," she said slowly. "No, not this group mind that you sense. But something human. Somebody is looking for us. Somebody human wants us as badly as *they* do."

"Your underground movement, maybe?" I suggested.

Before she could reply the train stopped at a poorly lit station.

The door of our car opened suddenly, admitting three men and two women. They were pale and thin and the drab grey coveralls they wore were torn and patched. Each of them had red hair. And their eyes were alive. They were the first real humans we had seen in this world.

"Here they are!" said the leader, a tall man whose hair and beard were in startling contrast to the pallor of his face, whose long, sharp nose jutted out like the beak of a bird. "A male and a female in strange clothing. *She* could be one of us."

"The platform's clear," said one of the girls.

There was something about her voice that was familiar. I looked at her closely. She could have been Margaret's twin—a twin who had suffered from years of malnutrition and rough treatment.

"Good!" said the leader. "Gather around, hide them in case anybody comes along before we start."

"There's a couple of slaves coming," said the girl.

Knives flashed into sight. The tall leader drew a weapon that looked like one of the old muzzle-loading, single-shot pistols.

"They went into the next coach."

"Who are you?" I asked.

The leader grinned, showing uneven, discolored teeth.

"We could ask the same," he said. "When the time is more suitable we shall ask. But first of all, your clothes." Two of his followers produced grey bundles. "Get into these."

V

It was no time for either modesty or squeamishness. It was obvious that the coveralls—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

skimpy, ill-made boiler suits they were—would not go on over our outer clothing and so, while the train rattled and groaned over the uneven track, we stripped to our underthings, pulled on the dirty garments. The touch of them was harsh to the skin; harsh and greasy with the muck and perspiration of months of wear.

One of the red-haired strangers produced a sack made of the same coarse material as his clothing. Into it went my jacket, my trousers and Margaret's clothing. Reluctantly I removed my necktie, dropped it into the bag after the other clothes.

Margaret, flushed with embarrassment, was standing next to her "twin." Now that there was no great difference in dress, their resemblance was even more striking. One of the two women was better fed than the other, cleaner, and healthier. One wore rings on her reasonably well-kept hands. The hands of the other were dirty and scarred.

"Sit down," ordered the tall man. "We have time to talk—unless the slaves or members come in. Where are you from?"

"I thought Peter was to carry out the interrogation," said one of the others in a surly voice.

"That's as may be, but I'm in charge now . . . Where do you come from?" he said to me.

I hesitated. For all we knew to the contrary we might have escaped from the fryingpan only to fall into the fire. And yet, these people, for all their rough appearance, seemed to be free men and women. Mentally free, at least. I decided to talk.

I said, "We come from a parallel Time track."

A claim to Alpha Centaurian citizenship would have been received with rather more credulity. There was a long silence, broken at last by one of the men, who growled, "I don't believe it. I say they're the result of some damned new experiment in breeding. We know that the Dring has taken thousands of men and women to its own cursed planet."

"Even so," said the tall man, "they're on the run. Our watchers have picked up the Dring orders; that's why we got here first. They're on the run, so they're not friends of the Dring."

"That's what the Dring *wants* us to think. It's a trap."

"No. I don't think so. The Dring is as stupid as any of its members. It uses force, but never guile."

"I've heard of traitors," said the shorter of the two women. "People like ourselves who aren't under Dring control. Yet who've sold out to the Dring for little extra comforts. There was Carter . . ."

"Ay," agreed the leader slowly, "there was Carter . . ."

"And Carter led a band of members and slaves to our dynamite factory . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And we caught Carter!" snarled one of the men. He had his knife out, was testing its edge on his thumb in a suggestive manner.

"Our orders," said the tall man, "are to take them to Peter. All the same, if there's any show of treachery . . ."

"But we *do* come from another World!" I said desperately. "Not another World exactly, but this World as it would have been—might have been—had there never been a Dring invasion. This is the third World we have visited tonight. In one of the others we heard of, but did not meet, my twin. No, not twin—myself."

"Where is your proof?" sneered the leader.

"Here. Look at the resemblance between my wife and—and . . ." I pointed to the woman who was my wife's double.

"Margaret," said the tall red-haired woman, "is my name."

"Yes, even the same name! And the surname is, unless you are married . . ."

"I *was* married," said the woman.

"The surname was Rutherford. Am I right? And one more thing—you have a mole on the inside of your left thigh."

"He's right!" said the woman, the Margaret of this World. "But where is *your* counterpart?"

"I don't know. But I can guess. Either he never existed or he's dead, or he's a slave. One thing I've noticed since we got here—Margaret's immune to the long-range hypnosis of the Dring. I'm not, although the thing seems to have stopped trying to order me around now. Margaret has red hair. I haven't. She's immune. I'm not. Am I right in supposing that all red-haired people are immune to their remote control?"

"Some," said the leader. "Some, not all. Not enough of us to stage a full-scale revolt. But enough of us to cause the Dring some uneasiness. The Dring, in their ether-ships, rule the air. The Dring have numbers and weapons. We have neither—just the poor firearms with which our grandfathers fought, the even poorer ones that we have been able to make for ourselves . . ."

He pulled his muzzle loading pistol out of his pocket and looked at it ruefully. "This," he said, "against guns that shoot thunderbolts!"

"But what can you do?" asked Margaret.

"A little," said the tall man softly. "Only a little. Now that we have lost our dynamite factory there is not much that we can do. We find it hard enough even to make black powder. Our only hope is to strike at the Dring itself, at the *mind* of the hive. But how?"

"John!" warned the small woman sharply. "You are talking too much!"

"I don't think they're spies,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elsa. I've been probing their minds, and I've had glimpses of the strange World they come from. They live in London, like we do, and their house is not a dirty burrow in the ruins but stands in the air and the sunlight . . ."

"It will do her good," snapped Margaret's "twin," "to live as we do."

Margaret flushed angrily. But I felt sympathy for the other girl. Her bitterness was understandable. I pinched my wife's arm before she could make a cutting reply.

"What do you want of us?" I asked.

"If you can give it to us—the secret of travel between these parallel Worlds, as you call them. Think of it, man—if we could make such a journey, come back here with men and weapons we could drive the Dring back to their own planet!"

"I'm sorry," I said. "If I knew how, I'd tell you willingly. But we've been trying to get back, and we can't."

"What can you tell us of weapons?" demanded John.

"Too much—and too little. Enough to make you hate me for having raised your hopes. Not enough to give you the ghost of a clue to help you to make 'em for yourselves. Could you build a jet engine? Could you find a deposit of pitchblende? Could you extract uranium? Could you differentiate between the isotope you wanted and the ones you didn't? Could you build a breeder pile and make plutonium?"

"You're talking in riddles!"

"I'm not. But we're specialized, John, highly specialized. Give me a ship to navigate, and a full set of charts and ephemerae, and I'll take her anywhere in the World. Give me a typewriter and a supply of paper and I'll write you a story. Give me anything from a six-inch gun down to a point thirty stripped Lewis and I'll show you how to use it. But somebody else has to make them for me."

"All this risk," said the woman, Elsa, "for nothing. For a pair of fat, pampered apostles of uselessness who couldn't survive five minutes if left to themselves."

"Peter's the best judge of that," said John. "But, I am disappointed . . ."

"I wish they'd never come," said the widow Margaret.

She took the sack from the man who was holding it, pulled out my wife's costume, fingered the material with an expression of combined longing and envy that I found touching.

"Put that back!" snapped John.

The rest of the journey passed in a glum silence.

VI

We left the region of the great fires, drove through what, in the darkness, seemed to be wasteland broken only at sparse intervals by yellow, flickering lights.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We stopped briefly at station after station, all of them bare, dirty, wind-and-rain-swept platforms. Occasional parties of zombie-like slaves entered our compartment, travelling to unknown destinations. They never noticed us. They were looking—if they were looking for anything at all—for a man and a woman in strange, bright clothing.

Once we saw a dozen of the Dring marching in single file beneath the glimmering street lamps at one of the halts our train made. Their globular bodies were criss-crossed with a sort of harness, and from this hung metal tubes that could have been weapons.

At last, at a station that seemed no different from any of the others, John told us in a whisper that we were to get out. He led the way, letting his body fall into the shambling slouch that seemed characteristic of the slaves. The others of his party followed suit. Margaret and I did our best to imitate them.

He led us along the platform, past the dim light and the stairs. There was a loose slat in the fence at the end of the platform and this he pulled aside. He wriggled through the opening, vanished, and was followed by Elsa. One of the other men said that Margaret and I were to go next. On the other side of the fence we found a rough embankment, steep, overgrown with coarse weeds.

I heard John below me, the scraping noise of his shoes, an occasional sharply drawn breath. I was surprised when at last I found myself standing on reasonably level ground. Seconds later Margaret almost fell into my arms.

After the dim lighting in the train it did not take long for our eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. What we saw was a little like the workers' residential quarters in Hamburg that were devastated by the R.A.F. during the war. Like those houses, the extent of the damage was great, but because time had softened harsh, jagged outlines and trees and bushes had made their own successful invasion of the city.

But we were given no time to admire the scenery. John grasped my Margaret's arm, and the other Margaret grasped mine, and we hurried along over a rough track. There was no street lighting here but the reflected glare from the great fires that we had seen earlier served to light our path, after a fashion. We followed the railway embankment, passed under another station.

Then John, who was in the lead, stopped suddenly. He whistled softly, a repetition of two notes, over and over. Finally there came a faint creaking and a door set in the embankment—its surface camouflaged with earth and grass—opened outwards.

"The word?" croaked a voice.

"Security," whispered John.

"Enter."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old man who had opened the door whipped the cover off an oil lantern, held it high to examine us. Satisfied, he said, "Peter is waiting."

"Good. Follow me."

John lit another lantern from the first, led us along a maze of tunnels. The air was heavy with the smell of stale earth, of mildew, of the smoke of rancid, burning oil. There was another guard to pass, this one stationed outside a heavy, wooden door. He contented himself with a long and minute inspection of Margaret and myself, opened the door without a word. Through it and we found ourselves in a room about twenty feet square and ten high. There was a desk, a heavy Victorian piece of furniture, and behind it a matching chair.

An old man with white, yellow-stained hair and beard was sitting at the desk. He acknowledged John's military salute with a casual wave of his hand, motioned us all to the plain hard benches before him.

"Your names?" he asked as soon as we were seated.

"Andrew Dunstan," I said, "and Margaret Dunstan."

"Where do you come from?"

I told him. I told him the whole story. He did not seem too incredulous. After all, I reflected, the interplanetary invasion must have been a very recent memory when he was young. He must, through his parents, have felt, even at second hand, something of the wonder as well as the terror of it all.

"I am an old man," he said when I was finished. "I am older, perhaps, than you think. I can remember the Dring ships in the sky, the fire that rained down upon London—that was all of a hundred years ago. I can remember being herded, with other children, into the Dring nurseries. Like ants they are, the Dring, and when they conquer they enslave . . . I knew from the first that I was not the same as most of the others—the Dring never got control of my mind. I was cunning enough to act as the other children did.

"For a while I worked in one of their factories. What was the work? I shoveled loose earth into a succession of little trucks, each of which was wheeled away after being filled. I never did anything else. None of the slaves—the real slaves—engaged in other work would, or could, tell me what they did.

"Then came the day—I was about fourteen—when I was turned out of the factory at the end of the day's work, pushed onto a train bound for the city. It is the policy of the Dring to let its workers house themselves among the ruins, scratch for their food in the scrubby little gardens —which is, of course, supplemented by a ration of synthetic food—and, of course, breed. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are under mental control the whole time, naturally.

"I knew what I was supposed to do, where I was supposed to go. But as I walked along the street from the station a woman suddenly rushed out from one of the ruined houses, clutched me to her. At first I didn't recognize her. Her hair—which had once been red when I had seen her last—was now grey. Her clothes were in rags. If it had not been for the telepathic faculty that all of us seem to have developed I would never have known her for my mother.

"But it was my mother. She and a dozen others who had escaped both massacre and slavery were living together in the ruins, plotting a hopeless vengeance. They never knew how hopeless it was. We know, but still *we* plot, too. The human race does not easily give way to despair.

"I had hoped," he said, "that you would be able to help us. We thought at first that you were voyagers from some other planet who had come in a ship like the Dring ether-ships, a ship with equipment and weapons that we could use. But . . ." He was silent for a while, his fingers thoughtfully combing his beard. "We may still be able to use you," he added finally.

"How?"

"From what you have told me, your world is not at peace. Your people have weapons, powerful weapons. Could you remember how they are made?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "A very limited number of weapons I can handle. I could strip and reassemble any of the machine guns we used in the war. But make them? You haven't the tools, the technology."

"I was afraid of that . . . Now, here is another way. Not all the Humans are either slaves or rebels. There is another class—a pampered class—that rarely leaves the Dring hives. They are people like ourselves who are immune to mesmerism. But they see nothing wrong with the present state of affairs; to them the Dring is father and mother, comfort and security. Now and again, as you know perhaps, one of our number has turned traitor, has deserted us for the easy living of the hive. We have often thought of sending in a pseudo-traitor—it has been tried. But minds in this world are read far too easily. Those whom we have sent have been returned, their tortured and mutilated bodies dumped in the street.

"Another technique we have attempted—prisoners whose capture has been a matter of intention on our part. But they, like the others, have never penetrated the outer guard of members and tame Humans to the Dring itself. But the Dring will want to make a personal examination—if *it* can be called a person—of you and your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wife. If the Dring can be killed, then . . ."

"Killed? But how?"

"We have a limited supply of dynamite. A stick, hidden in the bag that your wife carries . . . But it will not be your wife, of course. It will be our Margaret, wearing her clothes. But *you* must go with her for we have no double that we can use in your place."

"It's not my world," I began. I looked at Margaret, my Margaret. "It's not *our* world," I said slowly. "But these are our people. There's a chance that we shall be able to help them, to destroy this Dring . . ."

"If you're going," she said, "I want to go, too."

"I'm sorry," said the old man, Peter. "It's not possible. Have you ever thrown a bomb? Do you know how to handle one of our bombs?" There was a finality in his voice that inhibited any reply to his rhetorical questions. He said, then, "I am pleased that you replied as you did. I had one last argument that I was hoping I should not have to use. There has been no need for me to use it. But I shall tell you, just the same.

"We have reason to believe that the Dring ships have been able to cross the strange barrier between your world and this. Over three years ago one was observed by our people flying low over London, drifting down to the landing field. Hanging from its underside was a strange flying ship, a thing with wings and a fish-like body. We have never seen such a machine in our sky. We did not know, until tonight where it could have come from. Now, having heard of your world, and the others, we can do more than guess. All right, John, the clothing . . ."

The tall man produced the bag, handed it to me silently. I took from it my jacket and trousers, my necktie. The woman, Margaret, took from it my wife's tweed skirt and jacket, said, "It must be a complete change of dress. Otherwise I shall not feel the part . . ."

I looked at my wife, saw by her expression that she realized the reason for the request. Her double wanted to experience the feel of silk and nylon, to be dressed, for once in her life, as a woman should. She said, "All right. Is there a room?"

"There is," said the other Margaret, and led the way out of the large apartment.

"While we're waiting," said old Peter, "I will show you the bomb. I do not expect that you will use it, that you will be in any state to use it. There is, however, just a chance that you might. When you feel the Dring taking hold of your mind again fill your thoughts with anything—multiplication tables, poetry—and you may keep it out. And keep hold of Margaret's hand.

"And the bomb . . . It's simple, isn't it? This little tube contains the detonator, the spring that works the firing-pin and a strand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of wire. It contains, too, a very fragile phial of acid. When the phial is broken the acid eats through the wire, releasing the spring. For this bomb we have chosen an almost instantaneous fuse."

"So whoever uses the bomb . . ."

"Must throw it as soon as the phial is broken."

"I see." I knotted my tie, wishing there was a mirror.

The two Margarets came in. The one wearing the tweed costume picked the bomb off the desk, looked at it briefly, pushed it carelessly—too carelessly, I thought—into the handbag. She was wearing rings, I noticed, and the cat's eye and tortoiseshell bracelet I had brought home from Suva, and a wristwatch. As she fumbled with the handbag she sat on the edge of the desk, looked down with approval at her nylon-stockinged legs.

"It was necessary," said Peter, "that every detail should be correct. The slave to whom you talked in the train will have supplied the Dring with a detailed picture of both of you, and that picture will have been passed on to all other slaves and members. Now—are you ready?"

"Not quite," I said. I walked over to my Margaret and kissed her. She said, trying hard to grin, "Be careful." Her double got down from the desk, stood waiting.

It was John who led us from the underground headquarters, took us out through a maze of tunnels that led eventually to a door not unlike the one by which we had entered. It was not the same door, though—opposite towered the ruins of a large church, black and ragged against the ruddy sky.

"We shall be following," he said. "Good luck."

VII

I wanted to keep to the edge of the road, but Margaret would have none of it. We were to be captured, she insisted, and the sooner this came about the better. So, incongruously, arm in arm, we walked through the ruined city with no attempt at concealment. And we talked.

"Your wife," said Margaret, "I was able to get inside her mind, and she in mine. If you and I are probed too closely I shall be able to deceive the Dring—for a while, at least . . ." Then after a silence, "Why don't you smoke?"

I pulled out my pipe, filled it carefully. The flare of the first match was startlingly bright. I used a second one, and just as I was getting the pipe to draw a bright, blue-white light flashed from the doorway of a dilapidated building, momentarily blinding us. There was an agitated chirping noise like nothing so much as a swarm of disturbed crickets, and a human voice crying, "There they are!"

My first impulse was to run.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My second to fight. But with Margaret's restraining hand on my arm I did neither. And then I started to worry about the fragile glass phial, and what it was part of, in her handbag. But I need not have done so. Our captors were surprisingly gentle. They contented themselves with leveling bright metal tubes at us, telling us to come with them. With the light no longer shining in our eyes I could see that six of them were human, six the almost globular Dring. The aliens, after their first agitated chirping, were silent; the humans said little.

After a short walk we came to what must once must have been a public garden. The dark, weed-grown area was almost filled with a hulking mass that gleamed metallically in the beam of the light carried by our captors. We climbed a short ladder to a dimly lighted, circular doorway, were pushed into a small, dark room. A metal door clanged shut, imprisoning us in total blackness.

There were no seats so we sat on the deck. It vibrated under us, seemed to lift and tilt. "One of their ether ships," whispered Margaret.

I got matches out of my pocket, struck one. The light showed nothing but four steel bulkheads, a steel deck, a steel deckhead. There were no ports. I dropped the match as it burnt my fingers.

"Can we talk?" I asked. "Is there danger of anybody overhearing, or eavesdropping on our thoughts?"

"No," she said. "I should feel it if they were probing. I got the impression, when we were brought into the ship, that we were to be taken straight to the Dring, that there was to be on questioning of us by any lesser being."

The matter-of-factness of her voice shook me. Margaret's voice, Margaret's body—and the discussion of such matters as though they were no more fantastic than a comment on the butcher's bill or the evening's TV program . . .

The deck seemed to tilt more steeply, throwing us together. I became alarmed again about the lethal contents of the handbag. I said, "But the stupidity! You'd think they'd have searched us for weapons!"

"The Dring *is* stupid," she said. "Powerful and stupid. The Tamies are stupid; they have lived for too long like petted animals."

There was a sudden jar beneath us. The vibration of the deck ceased. The door suddenly opened.

Two of the humans came into the cramped cabin, pointed the metal tubes at us and told us to get up. We did so, followed a third human along the short alleyway, down the steps to the ground.

We found that we were standing at the base of one of the huge pyramids we had seen earlier. It towered all of a thousand feet into the sky. From the flat top of it billowed smoke and ruddy flame,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and some freak of down-draught brought with it heat and acrid fumes, a sulphurous fog that half obscured the hurrying figures of men and Dring, all of whom seemed to be moving with the frantic activity of a disturbed ant hill. There was the dull, rhythmic clangor of machinery.

We were led by our guards to a ramp, the angle of which was a little too steep for human feet and legs. It zig-zagged up the face of the pyramid, a slippery, precarious climb. The heat seared our lungs, the acrid smoke half-blinded us, made us choke and cough.

We passed numbers of downward bound Dring members and human slaves, all of whom stood to one side to allow us free passage. One of the slaves, I remember, lost his footing, fell from the ramp down the face of the pyramid. Not one human or alien raised a hand to try to save him. Not one seemed even to notice his going.

It was half way up the huge erection that we came to the door. It was the entrance to a tunnel of almost circular section, the walls of which glowed with a pale, cold luminosity. Once I put out a hand to steady myself, found that they were slimy to the touch, seemed to crawl beneath the pressure. It was at this time, too, that I felt the first attempted invasion of my mind since the escape from the train.

At once I began mentally to recite the Articles, the seaman's Rule of the Road, that long list of regulations that every officer commits to memory. Also I caught Margaret's hand, held it tightly in mine.

It helped, although it did not entirely dispel the mental intruder. It was like . . . It was like somebody fumbling in a darkened room, fumbling and stumbling and muttering to himself. It felt like spiders on the skin, like a spider web caught across the face when you are walking through a garden by night.

"Has it got you?" asked Margaret urgently.

"No," I managed to say.

We came at last to a room, a spherical chamber. Its interior surface glowed with the same cold light as had the walls of the tunnel. It must have been all of forty feet in diameter. Strands of silk, each no thicker than a lead pencil, converged to the centre of the sphere, merged to form a huge cocoon.

Around this, Dring and human guards supported themselves on the seemingly frail webbing. Of the thing inside the cocoon we could see nothing. There was a faint, dry whispering noise, a vaguely heard stridulation.

One of the guards—a big man, fat, the remnants of his red hair like a priestly tonsure—spoke.

"We know," he said, "where you come from. We know that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you are from the Third Level. How did you get here?"

I looked at the guards, the attendants, at the shining tubes that dangled at their belts. I weighed the possibility of a wild leap, of snatching one of the weapons, of fighting back to the clean outer air. And I saw that any leap would be frustrated by the tangled web.

And with the relaxation of mental vigilance the voice came back into my mind, the dry, rustling whisper of the Dring, the thing in the cocoon.

"You will serve the Dring," the voice said. "All beings serve the Dring. You will open your mind so the Dring may learn of the Third Level, of its power and its weaknesses. *Open your mind! Open your mind!*" The words began to beat against my consciousness . . .

"Andrew!" Margaret was shaking me. "Wake up! Wake up! Don't let it get you!"

Two of the almost globular Dring members started towards us, swinging through the web like enraged spiders. Margaret fumbled inside the handbag, brought out the bomb—threw it. Straight and true it skimmed through the air, not touching any of the strands of the web.

The Dring must have realized its danger for abruptly the probing, questioning mind was withdrawn from mine. *Almost instantaneous,* I thought, and let go of the silken strand that I was holding.

I pulled Margaret down to the curved floor with me, scrambled with her toward the mouth of the tunnel . . .

And we made it. The blast caught us, drove us like projectiles in the barrel of a gun. There was heat, pressure, and noise that was felt rather than heard.

Then there was blackness . . .

VIII

I cannot say how long I was unconscious. I was awakened, I think, by Margaret's moaning. I felt the weight of her across me, carefully and painfully wriggled out from under her. There was no light in the tunnel now, but a dull, ruddy glimmer marked the entrance through which we had come from outside.

"Margaret!" I said.

I got to my knees, bent over her. There was no blood that I could feel. Slowly, carefully, I lifted her to a sitting posture. She gasped, then retched painfully. I could feel the shaking of her thin body.

"You did it," I said. "You destroyed him."

She made no reply at first. She was conscious, her hands were working away feverishly at something. Then—"Take them," she said slowly. "Not mine. Wouldn't rob . . ."

I felt the thing she was pressing on me. There was my wife's watch, her bracelet.

"Tell her," she said, "thank

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you. Tell her, thank you for me!"

"You must keep them," I urged, pressing them into her hand.

"No good to me . . . now. Finished. Broken . . . inside, somewhere . . ." Again she was shaken by the dreadful retching. "Should have liked . . . Too late . . ."

I held her tightly until she was still. Then I put the watch and bracelet back on to the dead wrist, got slowly to my feet. I didn't like to leave her there, but what else could I do? I staggered to the mouth of the tunnel.

There was fighting in the open space below the pyramid. Dark human figures milled around, the glare of the fires shone from the bright steel of knives and axes. Now and again there was the bright, intensely blue flare of the Dring weapons. Now and again the orange flash of a black powder-loaded pistol. The sound of yells and screams, of explosions, drifted up faintly.

Somebody, I saw, was climbing up the ramp, somebody who was running with a reckless disregard of the dangers of that unrailed-off causeway. I had no weapons, and not for all the wealth in the world would I have gone back into that spherical chamber in which the dynamite bomb had exploded. It was a friend, I told myself. It had to be a friend. If not, a swift kick would send whoever it was tumbling down the face of the pyramid before he could come to grips with me . . .

It was Margaret.

"Andrew!" she cried, while she was yet all of twenty feet away. "You're safe!"

She stopped, gasping and coughing, feeling the effects both of her exertions and the acrid fumes that were still billowing down from the top of the pyramid.

I walked down to meet her.

"And the other?" she asked. "The other . . . me?"

"Dead," I said.

"I knew it, somehow. I felt it." She laughed hysterically. "Which of us was it? Which one? Which one?"

I got hold of her then, and I pulled her closely to be. "*You're* here," I said. "And that's all that matters."

After a while she murmured, "We must go. They are waiting for us."

"Who?"

"John and his people. They have a locomotive all ready. They want to take us back to the old man, Peter. They say that we, with our knowledge, are too precious to be risked in the fighting."

"Who *is* fighting?"

"The Tamies. They're shocked and disorganized, but they're fighting back. The Dring members are just wandering around like chickens with their heads cut off, but the Tamies are fighting. There's another Dring mind some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where and they're trying to wake it so it can take over."

A voice called from below. "Andrew! Margaret!"

"All right," I shouted back. "We're coming!"

When we got down to ground level all seemed to be over but the mopping up. The fires were dying, and dawn was grey in the sky, and light rain was seeping down on the sprawled, untidy bodies. John received us—a John whose face was burned, whose left arm hung limply at his side, whose clothing was torn and blood-stained.

He said briefly, "So she's dead. I thought both of you would be. But Peter wants you."

He led the way over rough ground, over a maze of railroad tracks, over a flat, hard surface that could have been concrete. Then there were more tracks, and one of the little, ugly locomotives standing there, panting impatiently. There were two men in the cab, strangers to us. One of them helped Margaret to climb up to the footplate.

"Tell Peter," said John to me, "that we're still looking for the new brain. It's here, somewhere. It's not awake yet."

I climbed up into the cab.

One of the two men threw a shovel load of coal into the furnace, the other opened a valve. The engine snorted, its wheels screamed on the greasy tracks before they gained traction. Then, with a jerk we were off, past the huge pyramids, past the columns of smoke, through the bare, sterile countryside. Through drab, comfortless stations we rattled, ignoring the hordes of grey-clad slaves who, dumb and uncomprehending, waited patiently for the trains that would never come again to bear them to their hovels in the ruined city.

Frankly, I was rather enjoying it. Most of us still possess the boyhood ambition to ride on the footplate of a railway engine, and it is an ambition that for most of us is never realized. I watched the driver. I kept a keen lookout on the track ahead. But it never occurred to me to look astern.

It was Margaret who said, almost screaming, "It's following us!"

The driver turned away from his gauges, looked in the direction of her outstretched arm. He cursed. Gaining on us rapidly, skimming over the tracks, was one of the smaller saucers. Its flight was unsteady, it wavered and dipped, but it was gaining . . .

"John!" I said, suddenly. "It must be John! He must have captured one of the things, found out how to fly it . . . " But I knew, even as I said it, that it wasn't so.

A crackling bolt flashed from the saucer rim, gouged a smoking trench in the ground twenty feet from the tracks.

The driver watched his controls intently. The fireman threw on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more coal, raked and sliced. He said curtly, "Weapons. Back of cab. Use 'em."

There were weapons there, half a dozen of the metal tubes that we had seen carried both by the Dring and the Tamies. I picked one up. It was light, too light, and had no comfortable grip for a human hand. Inadvertently I pressed a stud about half way up the tube. There was a blinding flash of light, the reek of ozone, and a gaping hole showed in the roof of the cab—a hole whose fused edges still glowed redly.

Ignoring the driver's curses I leaned far out of the side of the cab, tried to bring the weapon to bear on the flying ship. My first shot was yards to the right. My second in line, but under. And the answering fire from the saucer sent the rails up in an eruption of molten iron not two feet behind our rear wheels.

Margaret was firing, too, and her aim, if anything, was worse than mine. All that saved us, I am convinced, was the unskillful pilotage that made it impossible for our enemies to bring their own, heavier, weapon accurately to bear.

The saucer swished overhead, roaring like a hive of angry bees. It fled along the tracks ahead of us, diminishing rapidly as it increased the range. Then it stopped, hovering directly over the lines. It was as impossible to get a fair shot at it as it hung there, even after I had battered out the dirty glass of the cab windows. From its underside lightning flared for long seconds, from the track sprayed a fountain of sparks and smoke.

The driver cursed, pulled back hard on the lever. The fireman wrenched a valve shut with frenzied hands. The locomotive rocked and shuddered—and still sped on locked, screaming wheels to the inevitable disaster.

"Jump!" Margaret was crying. "Jump!"

But nobody heeded her. Driver and fireman were still fighting to bring their engine under control, and I—or so I was told later—was shouting vile curses at the top of my lungs.

We were so close to the saucer now that I could fire over the boiler of the locomotive. The long, ugly smokestack went with the first shot. Then I scored a direct hit on the underbelly of the lenticulate ship. The firing stud hurt my thumb as it tried to jump back to the "off" position.

But I kept it pressed. The tube heated rapidly. The blue glare of the continuous discharge blinded me. Then the weapon went dead . . .

The saucer fell, sliding off away from us in a steep glide. We never saw it hit the ground. Directly ahead of us now, no more than a few feet, was the broken track, the tangle of fused, twisted metal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jump!" the driver was shouting. "Jump!"

I grabbed Margaret's hand . . .

There was an infinitude of tracks before us, parallel rows of gleaming steel stretching away into a grey, formless distance, meeting each other at impossible angles. I caught Margaret to me, holding her tightly. We felt the locomotive dip and lurch, braced ourselves for the crash

There was no crash. The train slowed gently, sighed to a halt. I looked out of the window of the coach.

"Hounslow Central," I said.

We got out at the next stop. We caught a 120 Bus, got off at The Duke of Wellington, walked home. It was raining, still, and there were few people abroad in the early morning streets. Those we did meet seemed not to notice Margaret's drab, grey overalls.

The house was empty. The children, luckily, were spending a week with their grandparents. We let ourselves in, went to the kitchen and, in silence, brewed ourselves a pot of tea. While we were drinking it there was a knock at the door. Margaret started violently, knocking her cup over.

"I'll go," I said, sounding braver than I felt.

"It's only the morning paper," I said as I returned.

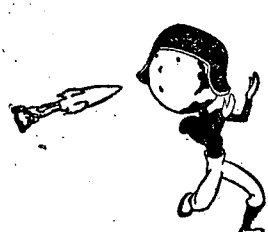
"Let me have it," she said. "I want to see it—Russians, Korea, atom bombs and all . . ."

She snatched it from me, handed it back almost at once, her thumb marking a paragraph on the front page. I read it in silence. It was about two stange people, a man and a woman, who had been seen in London the previous night. The man was dressed in a wartime Nazi officer's uniform. There had been a brush with the police, and a constable had been shot. The gunman and his woman were still at large . . .

"They'll never get them *now*," said Margaret.

She got up, started to unbutton the overalls she was still wearing. She fingered the cloth with distaste, whispered slowly, "I'm glad that I—that she, I mean—wore nice woman's things . . . before I died . . ."

I looked down at the mess on the kitchen floor where I had dropped my cup.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

once a first wife . . .

by . . . Norman Arkawy

She writhed under the judges' merciless scrutiny. The charge against her was surely a most grievous one—marital fidelity!

GENEVA, DEC. 11 (*SP*)—*The first contested suit for divorce in eighty-three years was brought to trial today before the Terran High Court in this city. Justices Schluss, Jones and Klyutch presided at the unprecedented proceeding in which Merl Wisson petitioned for a divorce from his first-wife, Sar.*

The petitioner's case, a charge of sexual incompetence, was presented today. Tomorrow, Mrs. Wisson's attorney will begin the unusual contesting action. The court's decision is expected tomorrow or the following day.

Since the middle of the twenty-first century, when the Uniform Divorce Code was adopted throughout the system, grounds for divorce have included only incompatability, sexual incompetence, and sterility. The Wisson case, however, is the first in history in which one of the "stigma" charges has been used. In every previous divorce action, petition has been made on the grounds of incompatibility and has been filed mutually by both husband and first-wife.

When questioned by this re-

The world of 2136, when seen through the eyes of a woman unjustly accused and fighting to remain an individual in her own right can take on somber overtones of high tragedy. Norman Arkawy has a rare talent for looking ahead and interpreting the future in realistically compelling terms.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

porter, Mr. Wisson said that he would have preferred to seek the divorce less sensationally, on the usual incompatibility charge, but that his first-wife has refused to agree to an uncontested action.

Mrs. Wisson made no comment.

SAR DROPPED the newstrip into the disposall. A sardonic smile curled her lip. "I'll comment," she muttered, "tomorrow—in court!"

Dag yawned and stretched luxuriously. She sat up on the couch and looked searchingly at her sister. "You must love him very much," she said.

"Love him?" Sar laughed, and said viciously, "I detest him!"

Dag reached into her pocket for her pack of Happies. She put a barkastem in her mouth and offered the pack to Sar. They nibbled in silence.

"I don't understand," Dag said, finally, shaking her head. "If you feel that way why don't you let him have the divorce? Why keep him if you hate him?"

Sar smiled indulgently at her sister. "I don't want to keep him. I want him to keep me!"

The blank look on Dag's face clearly indicated her bewilderment.

"I'm forty-one," Sar explained. "If I'm divorced now, what chance do you suppose I'll have to become a first-wife again? It's hard enough getting a man when you're young. And I have no intention of becoming a second-wife. The first-wife pension is too good to give up! In nine more years I'll be eligible for it. Then Merl can have his divorce and get himself another first-wife. But not until then!"

"What if the court grants the divorce?"

"How can they?" Sar demanded. "My competence can't be questioned, no matter how many bribed witnesses Merl may have. Anyone can look at the record and see. And the six sturdy children who bear my name are certainly evidence that I'm not sterile.

"No, Dag," she summed up, "I'm not going to lose my rating. I don't know which one of Merl's second-wives aspires to be Mrs. Wisson, but whoever she is, she's going to be disappointed unless she's willing to wait nine years. And by then," she added wryly, "she'll be too old to suit Merl. I'm afraid she'll have to be satisfied to remain a second-wife."

Sar laughed. "Once a second-wife, always a second-wife," she said. "Or, what's more to the point—once a first-wife . . ."

The courtroom was crowded the next morning when Sar Wisson's attorney rose to present his case. It was up to him to disprove the charge of sexual incompetence, a charge which his opponent had attempted to substantiate solely on the testimony of Sar's husband

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and several men who claimed to have had unsatisfactory love affairs with her. It was up to him to discredit the testimony of these men, and establish the fact of Sar's competence.

"Honorable members of the court," he began. "I shall prove beyond any doubt that the charge against my client, Mrs. Sar Wisson, has no basis in fact. Having established her competence, I shall request the court to deny the petition for divorce.

"If it please the court," he announced, "I should like to call Mrs. Sar Wisson to the stand."

When Sar had made herself comfortable in the seat opposite the judges' dais, her lawyer began the examination. "*Mrs.* Wisson," he said, emphasizing the title that only a first-wife is entitled to, "do you understand the charge made against you? Do you know what sexual incompetence is?"

"I do."

"To the best of your knowledge, are you incompetent?"

"I am not!"

"Object!" shouted Merl's attorney. "Her competence or incompetence is something which she is not in a position to judge. Naturally, she belives herself to be . . ."

Justice Klyutch, the presiding officer of the court, waved the attorney to silence. "Overruled," he said. "The woman has a right to speak in her own defense. However, the court will take note of the source of the testimony, counselor."

"Now, Mrs. Wisson," Sar's lawyer resumed, "did you hear the testimony of the witnesses called by the petitioner yesterday? I refer to the four men who said they had been your lovers."

"I heard what they said, and it was a pack of lies!"

"Please, Mrs. Wisson," the lawyer cautioned, "just answer the questions I ask you. Don't elaborate.

"Now then—did you ever have affairs with any of these men?"

"I did not!"

"Do you know them? Have you ever seen them before?"

"I know Jon Barra," Sar replied. "He's my husband's business partner. The other three I never saw before in my life."

There was a mild ripple of hushed comment among the spectators in the room. The bailiffs quickly restored order and the judge motioned the lawyer to continue.

"I should like to submit as evidence these certified photostats of the educational records of Sar Wisson, nee Malcom," the lawyer announced.

The papers were accepted by the clerk of the court and labeled as exhibits A, B, and C. Copies of the evidence were handed to the justices who studied them intently while waiting for Sar's attorney to continue.

"You will note," he said, "that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Wisson's grades in sexual education are all excellent. Class nine," he read, "Fundamental Biology—grade one. Class eleven, Basic Sex—grade one. Class twelve, Adolescent Sexology—grade two. Class thirteen, History of Romance—grade one. Class fourteen, Sexual Techniques . . ."

Justice Klyutch interrupted him by pressing the 'hold' button, causing the amber light on the front of the rostrum to flash warningly. "There's no need to list them all, counselor," he said. "The court recognizes the evidence submitted. We can read the reports."

"Yes, Your Honor. But I should like to point out especially that Mrs. Wisson was the top honor student in her class in Advanced Sexual Techniques in class twenty-one," the lawyer pursued. "As a result, she received the Aphrodite Award at the University commencement exercises in twenty-one-sixteen. How can such a woman be called sexually incompetent? Obviously, she is not only competent—she's expert!"

Merl's lawyer rose to his feet. "Objection," he said calmly, matter-of-factly. "We do not contest the lady's aptitude twenty years ago, when she last attended school. We do question her ability now—today, this year. It is regrettable that time and age can cause even the best of us to lose his or her talent, but such is the way of nature. And it is our contention that, regardless of her superior record in school, Sar Wisson is sexually incompetent *today*."

Sar leaped to her feet. "That's not true!" she shouted angrily. "It's not true!" Tears welled in her eyes and there was a catch in her voice as she said defiantly, "I'm only forty-one. I'm not old!"

The courtroom hummed excitedly over the dramatic outburst.

Sar felt as if a million eyes were staring at her, a million tongues talking about her. She was conscious of an awkward stiffness in every part of her body, which was suddenly a strange, uncomfortable garment she wished she could throw off.

She sat down again, folding her hands in her lap, nervously clasping and unclasping her fingers. Bowing her head, she fixed her gaze on the floor. Shame was an emotion she rarely felt. She felt it now, covering her, pervading the air around her. It was stifling.

The buzzing in the courtroom grew louder, more excited.

The full meaning of the accusation suddenly opened up to her and she realized how serious it was. Yesterday she had laughed at the absurdity of the charge. Now she was infuriated by its viciousness. They actually meant to ruin her!

Stripped of her first-wife respectability, at forty-one she might not even have the opportunity of becoming a second-wife. And, although she would never be satis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fied as a second-wife, at least she would still live comfortably and receive a modest pension when she retired. But who would want an aging, *incompetent* woman, even as a second-wife?

There would be only one thing left for her to do. She would be forced to enlist in one of the 'publics'! That, or neutralization. And she could not submit to neutralization. Life in the 'publics' was not pleasant, but neutralization was no life at all.

Living in the 'publics' would be hell-on-earth. Her rations would be reduced to class C, and she would be assigned living space in a twelve-quarter dorm. She'd be given a four hour job and be required to put in four hours more in the service. But she would still be a woman. Unneutralized, she would live.

Live? Yes, she would live. She would live to cater to the men who utilized the Government's public sexological stations. So many men —coarse, rough, unmateable men! The thought sickened her.

The warning light on the judges' rostrum flashed on, and the noise in the room gradually subsided. Order was restored. Justice Klyutch cautioned Sar not to disturb the decorum of the court again.

After Sar's lawyer had made a formal apology for his client's unusual conduct, his opponent pursued the argument he had begun before the outburst.

"We maintain that Sar Wisson is incompetent," he repeated. "We have shown," he continued, "that not only her husband, but also four other men have recently been dissatisfied with her. We have five witnesses attesting to her incompetence *now*. We are not concerned with her ability in the past.

"We have five witnesses," he emphasized, "who state, from personal experience, that she is incompetent."

He smiled triumphantly. "Does the respondent have *one* who will dispute our claim?"

Sar stared at him in awe, as one would stare at an unbelievable monstrosity, born in a fertilely imaginative mind and portrayed in the TDs by an actor suitably deformed by the genius of make-up. But this was no TD image—this monster was real and he was standing only a few feet away, leering at her, challenging her, hurting her, condemning her.

They knew that she could bring forth no witnesses in her defense. That was what made the challenge so cruel. They knew that she had had no lovers since before her first child was born, nineteen years ago. She had been a virtuous wife, a faithful wife. And now they were turning her very virtue against her!

"Do you have such a witness?" Justice Klyutch asked her attorney.

"I ask the court's permission to confer privately with my client,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the lawyer replied, rising hastily from his seat.

"Granted."

"No," Sar said abruptly. Her lawyer had hardly started across the room to the witness seat when her voice stopped him. "No," Sar repeated, "we have no witness."

"Your Honors," her lawyer said hurriedly, "I request that my client's remark be stricken from the record. It was not made in reply to a question, nor was it on advice of counsel." To Sar he said, "Please, Mrs. Wisson, do not volunteer information before you consult me."

"Why not?" Sar asked sadly. "There is no one. What good would it do to consult you?"

"Please, Mrs. Wisson," the lawyer insisted. "Perhaps there is someone whom you've forgotten. Perhaps you'll remember if you discuss it with me. Perhaps . . ."

"No," Sar pronounced, finally. "There has been no one. I won't invent a mythical lover. We have no witness."

The lawyer returned to his seat dejectedly. Sar had ruined whatever chance he might have had to bring in a false witness to dispute those presented by her husband.

If the court accepted the testimony of the four supposed lovers, the case was lost. Even without their testimony, it was a toss-up between Sar's word and her husband's. After all, records of an ability possessed twenty years ago really proved nothing about the present. So what if she had been an exceptionally apt student in school? After twenty years, she might be different—altogether different. She might very well be incompetent.

Sar, too, knew that she had spoiled her own opportunity to counteract the fraudulent testimony of her husband's friends. Yet, although she was afraid of the consequences of losing the case, she could not bring herself to lie about her private life. She could not claim lovers she had not had. It was ridiculous, she knew, in this day and age, but she was actually proud of her fidelity.

She watched the three judges lean together in conference. The millon eyes still peered at her. They pawed at her body, probed at her thoughts. She fidgeted under their merciless scrutiny as the minutes crept by and the judges' conference continued.

Stop! she wanted to shout. *Stop this torture! Say something—anything! But don't make me sit here like a freak on exhibition!*

Justices Jones and Schluss straightened in their seats on either side of the presiding judge. Chief justice Klyutch cleared his throat importantly.

"Mrs. Wisson," he said, "the court finds it impossible to properly evaluate all the evidence presented in this case. It is our judgment that the only way to determine your competence is to have an impartial reliable person test

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you. Do you agree to submit to such a test?"

She nodded her head quickly. Of course she would agree. She'd agree to anything if they'd only let her get off the stand—off display.

"My colleagues and I want to select for this test a man who is impartial and whose judgment is valued by this court," Klyutch continued, strangely nervous. He colored slightly before adding, "I have been nominated.

"Do you have any objections?" he asked her.

Sar smiled at him. She began to relax in the presence of his archaic modesty—the nervous shyness, the faint blush. Momentarily, she pitied him in his embarrassment and forgot, momentarily, to pity herself.

She smiled at him. There was certainly no reason to object to him any more than to any other man. Less, perhaps. He had a gentleness about him that Sar decided was rather attractive. But she appreciated the humor in being tested for competence by a man whose own competence might be questioned.

Justice Klyutch was a middle-aged widower whose first-wife had died three years ago—from boredom, some people said. He belonged to the small sect who called themselves monogamists and had no second-wives, and, since his wife's death, he had been living a monastic life.

But, although he may not have been the best qualified man for the job, Sar was quite willing to have him conduct the test. In fact, she reflected, he would probably be easy to convince . . .

When the court convened the next morning, every seat in the spectators' section was filled. The room was hushed in expectancy as the judges filed in and took their seats on the dais.

Justice Klyutch called the court to order.

Every ear in the room strained to hear his decision.

"At the close of yesterday's session," he began, "it was agreed that the court conduct a test to determine the competence of Sar Wisson, accused of incompetence by her husband. The test has been completed.

"It is the opinion of the court that the charge against Mrs. Wisson has no basis in fact. The request for divorce on the grounds of sexual incompetence is, therefore, denied."

An excited babbling swept across the room. It quickly subsided when the warning light indicated that the judge had not finished his pronouncement.

"However," Klyutch continued, "Mrs. Wisson has informed the court that she no longer objects to the divorce and that she is willing to agree to the action on the usual grounds of incompatibility."

Dag was amazed at the sudden turn of events. She couldn't be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lieve what she saw on the newstrip, screaming in maximum bold type.

WISSON DIVORCED!

And, in letters only slightly less emphatic, FIRST-WIFE WITHDRAWS OBJECTION.

Dag stared at the amazing heads, then began rapidly reading the story aloud to herself.

"Merl Wisson received a divorce from his first-wife, Sar, ten minutes after the court had refused the divorce on the charge of incompetence. In a sudden reversal of position, Sar Wisson agreed to the separation for reasons of incompatibility immediately after she had won her unprecedented contesting action. For the record, Justice Klyutch. . . ."

The newstrip fluttered to the floor as Dag's lifeless toss missed the disposall opening. She sat dazedly, watching the newsmachine disgorge strip after strip onto the growing pile of paper at her feet. Too stunned for the moment to get up and turn the machine off, she was vaguely thankful that she had set it only for local news. If the whole edition was allowed to accumulate on the floor, she'd have to dig herself out!

The machine clicked off automatically after a last strip floated down to the pile on the floor.

Aroused from her reverie as the newsmachine snapped itself off, Dag stood up. She searched her pockets for a barkastem, found one in a crumpled pack and slid it into her mouth. She nibbled thoughtfully.

Ignoring the mess of strips on the floor, she headed for the door, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery of Sar's change of heart.

Half an hour later, she was pressing the call button of Sar's apartment.

The door was opened by a tall, distinguished-looking man. Dag brushed by him abruptly and walked into the room. She saw her sister at the bar, mixing a couple of drinks.

"Sar!" she exclaimed. "What happened? I thought you were going to fight it."

Sar looked up and smiled a greeting. "Hello, Dag," she said.

"What happened?" Dag repeated anxiously.

"I changed my mind," Sar explained. "Woman's prerogative."

"But what about the pension, and the comforts and security?"

Sar laughed softly. "It turns out that that has nothing to do with divorcing Merl."

"But you said . . ."

"I said, 'once a first-wife, always a first-wife'," Sar reminded her.

Sar turned to the distinguished-looking man, who had been watching silently, listening to the exchange between the two women, a faint smile on his lips. "Ken, this is my sister, Dag.

"Dag," she said, completing the introduction, "I'd like you to meet Justice Klyutch."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

souvenir

by . . . Philip K. Dick

A hideous nightmare seemed the culture of Williamson's world—to men who knew nothing of beauty.

"HERE WE GO, SIR," the robot pilot said. The words startled Rogers and made him look up sharply. He tensed his body and adjusted the trace web inside his coat as the bubble-ship started dropping, swiftly and silently, toward the planet's surface.

This—his heart caught—was Williamson's World. The legendary lost planet—found, after three centuries. By accident, of course. This blue and green planet, the holy grail of the Galactic System, had been almost miraculously discovered by a routine charting mission.

Frank Williamson had been the first Terran to develop an outer-space drive—the first to hop off from the Solar System toward the universe beyond. He had never come back. He—his world, his colony—had never been found. There had been endless rumors, false leads, fake legends—and nothing more.

"I'm receiving field clearance." The robot pilot raised the gain on

Philip Dick's characters have an exciting way of letting their logically-motivated self-interest lead them straight down the flaming road to ruin. We suspect that it is this distinctly individual approach which has made him one of the most admired and widely read of science fiction writers of the past few years. Surely the conflict between adventurous idealism and blind self-seeking makes for spirited reading in any man's language.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the control speaker, and clicked to attention.

"Field ready," came a ghostly voice from below. "Remember, your drive mechanism is unfamiliar to us. How much run is required? Emergency brake-walls are up."

Rogers smiled. He could hear the pilot telling them that no run would be required. Not with this ship. The brake-walls could be lowered with perfect safety.

Three hundred years! It had taken a long time to find Williamson's World. Many authorities had given him up. Some believed he had never landed, had died out in space. Perhaps there was *no* Williamson's World. Certainly there had been no real clues, nothing tangible to go on. Frank Williamson and three families had utterly disappeared in the trackless void, never to be heard from again.

Until now . . .

The young man met him at the field. He was thin and red-haired and dressed in a colorful suit of bright material. "You're from the Galactic Relay Center?" he asked.

"That's right," Rogers said huskily. "I'm Edward Rogers."

The young man held out his hand. Rogers shook it awkwardly. "My name is Williamson," the young man said. "Gene Williamson."

The name thundered in Rogers' ears. "Are you—"

The young man nodded, his gaze enigmatical. "I'm his great-great-great-great-grandson. His tomb is here. You may see it, if you wish."

"I almost expected to see him. He's —well, almost a god-figure to us. The first man to break out of the Solar System."

"He means a lot to us, too," the young man said. "He brought us here. They searched a long time before they found a planet that was habitable." Williamson waved at the city stretched out beyond the field. "This one proved satisfactory. It's the System's tenth planet."

Rogers' eyes began to shine. Williamson's World. Under his feet. He stamped hard as they walked down the ramp together, away from the field. How many men in the Galaxy had dreamed of striding down a landing ramp onto Williamson's World with a young descendant of Frank Williamson beside them?

"They'll all want to come here," Rogers said, as if aware of his thoughts. "Throw rubbish around and break off the flowers. Pick up handfuls of dirt to take back." He laughed a little nervously. "The Relay will control them, of course."

"Of course," Rogers assured him.

At the ramp-end Rogers stopped short. For the first time he saw the city.

"What's wrong?" Gene Wil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liamson asked, with a faint trace of amusement.

They had been cut off, of course. Isolated—so perhaps it wasn't so surprising. It was a wonder they weren't living in caves, eating raw meat. But Williamson had always symbolized progress—development. He had been a man *ahead* of other men.

True, his space-drive by modern standards had been primitive, a curiosity. But the concept remained unaltered; Williamson the pioneer, and inventor. The man who built.

Yet the city was nothing more than a village, with a few dozen houses, and some public buildings and industrial units at its perimeter. Beyond the city stretched green fields, hills, and broad prairies. Surface vehicles crawled leisurely along the narrow streets and most of the citizens walked on foot. An incredible anachronism it seemed, dragged up from the past.

"I'm accustomed to the uniform Galactic culture," Rogers said. "Relay keeps the technocratic and ideological level constant throughout. It's hard to adjust to such a radically different social stage. But you've been cut off."

"Cut off?" asked Williamson.

"From Relay. You've had to develop without help."

In front of them a surface vehicle crept to a halt. The driver opened the doors manually.

"Now that I recall these factors, I can adjust," Rogers assured him.

"On the contrary," Williamson said, entering the vehicle. "We've been receiving your Relay coordinates for over a century." He motioned Rogers to get in beside him.

Rogers was puzzled. "I don't understand. You mean you hooked onto the web and yet made no attempt to—"

"We receive your coordinates," Gene Williamson said, "but our citizens are not interested in using them."

The surface vehicle hurried along the highway, past the rim of an immense red hill. Soon the city lay behind them—a faintly glowing plate reflecting the rays of the setting sun. Bushes and plants appeared along the highway. The sheer side of the cliff rose, a towering wall of deep red sandstone; ragged, untouched.

"Nice evening," Williamson said.

Rogers nodded in disturbed agreement.

Williamson rolled down the window. Cool air blew into the car. A few gnatlike insects followed. Far off, two tiny figures were plowing a field—a man and a huge lumbering beast.

"When will we be there?" Rogers asked.

"Soon. Most of us live away from the cities. We live in the country—in isolated self-sufficient farm units. They're modeled on the manors of the Middle Ages."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then you maintain only the most rudimentary subsistence level. How many people live on each farm?"

"Perhaps a hundred men and women."

"A hundred people can't manage anything more complex than weaving and dyeing and paper pressing."

"We have special industrial units—manufacturing systems. This vehicle is a good example of what we can turn out. We have communication and sewage and medical agencies. We have technological advantages equal to Terra's."

"Terra of the twenty-first century," Rogers protested. "But that was three hundred years ago. You're purposely maintaining an archaic culture in the face of the Relay coordinates. It doesn't make sense."

"Maybe we prefer it."

"But you're not free to prefer an inferior cultural stage. Every culture has to keep pace with the general trend. Relay makes actual a uniformity of development. It integrates the valid factors and rejects the rest."

They were approaching the farm, Gene Williamson's "manor." It consisted of a few simple buildings clustered together in a valley, to the side of the highway, surrounded by fields and pastures. The surface vehicle turned down a narrow side road and spiralled cautiously toward the floor of the valley. The air became darker. Cold wind blew into the car, and the driver clicked his headlights on.

"No robots?" Rogers asked.

"No," Williamson replied. "We do all our own work."

"You're making a purely arbitrary distinction," Rogers pointed out. "A robot is a machine. You don't dispense with machines as such. This car is a machine."

"True," Williamson acknowledged.

"The machine is a development of the tool," Rogers went on. "The axe is a simple machine. A stick becomes a tool, a simple machine, in the hands of a man reaching for something. A machine is merely a multi-element tool that increases the power ratio. Man is the tool-making animal. The history of man is the history of tools into machines, greater and more efficient functioning elements. If you reject machinery you reject man's essential key."

"Here we are," Williamson said. The vehicle came to a halt and the driver opened the doors for them.

Three or four huge wooden buildings loomed up in the darkness. A few dim shapes moved around—human shapes.

"Dinner's ready," Williamson said, sniffing. "I can smell it."

They entered the main building. Several men and women were sitting at a long rough table. Plates and dishes had been set in front

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of them. They were waiting for Williamson.

"This is Edward Rogers," Williamson announced. The people studied Rogers curiously, then turned back to their food.

"Sit down," a dark-eyed girl urged. "By me."

They made a place for him near the end of the table. Rogers started forward, but Williamson restrained him. "Not there. You're *my* guest. You're expected to sit with me."

The girl and her companions laughed. Rogers sat down awkwardly by Williamson. The bench was rough and hard under him. He examined a hand made wooden drinking cup. The food was piled in huge wooden bowls. There was a stew and a salad and great loaves of bread.

"We could be back in the fourteenth century," Rogers said.

"Yes," Williamson agreed. "Manor life goes back to Roman times and to the classical world. The Gauls. Britons."

"These people here. Are they—"

Williamson nodded. "My family. We're divided up into small units arranged according to the traditional patriarch basis. I'm the oldest male and titular head."

The people were eating rapidly, intent on their food—boiled meat, vegetables, scooped up with hunks of bread and butter and washed down with milk. The room was lit by fluorescent lighting.

"Incredible," Rogers murmured. "You're still using electric power."

"Oh, yes. There are plenty of waterfalls on this planet. The vehicle was electric. It was run by a storage battery."

"Why are there no older men?" Rogers saw several dried-up old women, but Williamson was the oldest man. And he couldn't have been over thirty.

"The fighting," Williamson replied, with an expressive gesture.

"Fighting?"

"Clan wars between families are a major part of our culture." Williamson nodded toward the long table. "We don't live long."

Rogers was stunned. "Clan wars? But—"

"We have pennants, and emblems—like the old Scottish tribes."

He touched a bright ribbon on his sleeve, the representation of a bird. "There are emblems and colors for each family and we fight over them. The Williamson family no longer controls this planet. There is no central agency, now. For a major issue we have the plebiscite—a vote by all of the clans. Each family on the planet has a vote."

"Like the American Indians."

Williamson nodded. "It's a tribal system. In time we'll be distinct tribes, I suppose. We still retain a common language, but we're breaking up—decentralizing. And each family to its own ways, its own customs and manners."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Just what do you fight for?"

Williamson shrugged. "Some real things like land and women. Some imaginary. Prestige for instance. When honor is at stake we have an official semi-annual public battle. A man from each family takes part. The best warrior and his weapons."

"Like the medieval joust."

"We've drawn from all traditions. Human tradition as a whole."

"Does each family have its separate deity?"

Williamson laughed. "No. We worship in common a vague animism. A sense of the general positive vitality of the universal process." He held up a loaf of bread. "Thanks for all this."

"Which you grew yourselves."

"On a planet provided for us." Williamson ate his bread thoughtfully. "The old records say the ship was almost finished. Fuel just about gone—one dead, arid waste after another. If this planet hadn't turned up, the whole expedition would have perished."

"Cigar?" Williamson said, when the empty bowls had been pushed back.

"Thanks." Rogers accepted a cigar noncommittally. Williamson lit his own, and settled back against the wall.

"How long are you staying?" he asked presently.

"Not long," Rogers answered. "There's a bed fixed up for you," Williamson said. "We retire early, but there'll be some kind of dancing, also singing and dramatic acts. We devote a lot of time to staging, and producing drama."

"You place an emphasis on psychological release?"

"We enjoy making and doing things, if that's what you mean."

Rogers stared about him. The walls were covered with murals painted directly on the rough wood. "So I see," he said. "You grind your own colors from clay and berries?"

"Not quite," Williamson replied. "We have a big pigment industry. Tomorrow I'll show you our kiln where we fire our own things. Some of our best work is with fabrics and screen processes."

"Interesting. A decentralized society, moving gradually back into primitive tribalism. A society that voluntarily rejects the advanced technocratic and cultural products of the Galaxy, and thus deliberately withdraws from contact with the rest of mankind."

"From the uniform Relay-controlled society only," Williamson insisted.

"Do you know why Relay maintains a uniform level for all worlds?" Rogers asked. "I'll tell you. There are two reasons. First, the body of knowledge which men have amassed doesn't permit duplication of experiment. There's no time."

"When a discovery has been made it's absurd to repeat it on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

countless planets throughout the universe. Information gained on any of the thousand worlds is flashed to Relay Center and then out again to the whole Galaxy. Relay studies and selects experiences and co-ordinates them into a rational, functional system without contradictions. Relay orders the total experience of mankind into a coherent structure."

"And the second reason?"

"If uniform culture is maintained, controlled from a central source, there won't be war."

"True," Williamson admitted.

"We've abolished war. It's as simple as that. We have a homogenous culture like that of ancient Rome—a common culture for all mankind which we maintain throughout the Galaxy. Each planet is as involved in it as any other. There are no backwaters of culture to breed envy and hatred."

"Such as this."

Rogers let out his breath slowly. "Yes—you've confronted us with a strange situation. We've searched for Williamson's World for three centuries. We've wanted it, dreamed of finding it. It has seemed like Prester John's Empire—a fabulous world, cut off from the rest of humanity. Maybe not real at all. Frank Williamson might have crashed."

"But he didn't."

"He didn't, and Williamson's World is alive with a culture of its own. Deliberately set apart, with its own way of life, its own standards. Now contact has been made, and our dream has come true. The people of the Galaxy will soon be informed that Williamson's World has been found. We can now restore the first colony outside the Solar system to its rightful place in the Galactic culture."

Rogers reached into his coat, and brought out a metal packet. He unfastened the packet and laid a clean, crisp document on the table.

"What's this?" Williamson asked.

"The Articles of Incorporation. For you to sign, so that Williamson's World can become a part of the Galactic culture."

Williamson and the rest of the people in the room fell silent. They gazed down at the document, none of them speaking.

"Well?" Rogers said. He was tense. He pushed the document toward Williamson. "Here it is."

Williamson shook his head. "Sorry." He pushed the document firmly back toward Rogers. "We've already taken a plebiscite. I hate to disappoint you, but we've already decided not to join. That's our *final* decision."

The Class-One battleship assumed an orbit outside the gravity belt of Williamson's World.

Commander Ferris contacted the Relay Center. "We're here. What next?"

"Send down a wiring team. Report back to me as soon as it has made surface contact."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ten minutes later Corporal Pete Matson was dropped overboard in a pressurized gravity suit. He drifted slowly toward the blue and green globe beneath, turning and twisting as he neared the surface of the planet.

Matson landed and bounced a couple of times. He got shakily to his feet. He seemed to be at the edge of a forest. In the shadow of the huge trees he removed his crash helmet. Holding his blast rifle tightly he made his way forward, cautiously advancing among the trees.

His ear phones clicked. "Any sign of activity?"

"None, Commander," he signaled back.

"There's what appears to be a village to your right. You may run into some one. Keep moving, and watch out. The rest of the team is dropping, now. Instructions will follow from your Relay web."

"I'll watch out," Matson promised, cradling his blast rifle. He sighted it experimentally at a distant hill and squeezed the trigger. The hill disintegrated into dust, a rising column of waste particles.

Matson climbed a long ridge and shielded his eyes to peer around him.

He could see the village. It was small, like a country town on Terra. It looked interesting. For a moment he hesitated. Then he stepped quickly down from the ridge and headed toward the village, moving rapidly, his supple body alert.

Above him, from the Class-One battleship, three more of the team were already falling, clutching their guns and tumbling gently toward the surface of the planet . . .

Rogers folded up the Incorporation papers and returned them slowly to his coat. "You understand what you're doing?" he asked.

The room was deathly silent. Williamson nodded. "Of course. We're refusing to join your Relay system."

Rogers' fingers touched the trace web. The web warmed into life. "I'm sorry to hear that," he said.

"Does it surprise you?"

"Not exactly. Relay submitted our scout's report to the computers. There was always the possibility you'd refuse. I was given instructions in case of such an event."

"What are your instructions?"

Rogers examined his wristwatch. "To inform you that you have six hours to join us—or be blasted out of the universe." He got abruptly to his feet. "I'm sorry this had to happen. Williamson's World is one of our most precious legends. But nothing must destroy the unity of the Galaxy."

Williamson had risen. His face was ash white, the color of death.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They faced each other defiantly.

"We'll fight," Williamson said quietly. His fingers knotted together violently, clenching and unclenching.

"That's unimportant. You've received Relay coordinates on weapons development. You know what our war fleet has."

The other people sat quietly at their places, staring rigidly down at their empty plates. No one moved.

"Is it necessary?" Williamson said harshly.

"Cultural variation must be avoided if the Galaxy is to have peace," Rogers replied firmly.

"You'd destroy us to avoid war?"

"We'd destroy anything to avoid war. We can't permit our society to degenerate into bickering provinces, forever quarreling and fighting—like your clans. We're stable because we lack the very concept of variation. Uniformity must be preserved and separation must be discouraged. The idea itself must remain unknown."

Williamson was thoughtful. "Do you think you can keep the idea unknown? There are so many semantic correlatives, hints, verbal leads. Even if you blast us, it may arise somewhere else."

"We'll take that chance." Rogers moved toward the door. "I'll return to my ship and wait there. I suggest you take another vote. Maybe knowing how far we're prepared to go will change the results."

"I doubt it."

Rogers' web whispered suddenly. "This is North at Relay."

Rogers fingered the web in acknowledgment.

"A Class-One battleship is in your area. A team has already been landed. Keep your ship grounded until it can fall back. I've ordered the team to lay out its fission-mine terminals."

Rogers said nothing. His fingers tightened around the web convulsively.

"What's wrong?" Williamson asked.

"Nothing." Rogers pushed the door open. "I'm in a hurry to return to my ship. Let's go."

Commander Ferris contacted Rogers as soon as his ship had left Williamson's World.

"North tells me you've already informed them," Ferris said.

"That's right. He also contacted your team directly. Had it prepare the attack."

"So I'm informed. How much time did you offer them?"

"Six hours."

"Do you think they'll give in?"

"I don't know," Rogers said. "I hope so. But I doubt it."

Williamson's World turned slowly in the view-screen with its green and blue forests, rivers and oceans. Terra might have looked that way, once. He could see the Class-One battleship, a great

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silvery globe moving slowly in its orbit around the planet.

The legendary world had been found and contacted. Now it would be destroyed. He had tried to prevent it, but without success. He couldn't prevent the inevitable.

If Williamson's World refused to join the Galactic culture its destruction became a necessity—grim, axiomatic. It was either Williamson's World or the Galaxy. To preserve the greater, the lesser had to be sacrificed.

He made himself as comfortable as possible by the viewscreen, and waited.

At the end of six hours a line of black dots rose from the planet and headed slowly toward the Class-One battleship. He recognized them for what they were—old-fashioned jet-driven rocket ships. A formation of antiquated war vessels, rising up to give battle.

The planet had not changed its mind. It was going to fight. It was willing to be destroyed, rather than give up its way of life.

The black dots grew, swiftly larger, became roaring blazing metal disks puffing awkwardly along. A pathetic sight. Rogers felt strangely moved, watching the jet-driven ships divide up for the contact. The Class-One battleship had left its orbit, and was swinging in a lazy, efficient arc. Its banks of energy tubes were slowly rising, lining up to meet the attack.

Suddenly the formation of ancient rocketships dived. They rumbled over the Class-One, firing jerkily. The Class-One's tubes followed their path. They began to reform clumsily, gaining distance for a second try, and another run.

A tongue of colorless energy flicked out. The attackers vanished.

Commander Ferris contacted Rogers. "The poor tragic fools." His heavy face was gray. "Attacking us with those things."

"Any damage?"

"None whatever." Ferris wiped his forehead shakily. "No damage to me at all."

"What next?" Rogers asked stonily.

"I've declined the mine operation and passed it back to Relay. They'll have to do it. The impulse should already be—"

Below them, the green and blue globe shuddered convulsively. Soundlessly, effortlessly, it flew apart. Fragments rose, bits of debris and the planet dissolved in a cloud of white flame, a blazing mass of incandescent fire. For an instant it remained a miniature sun, lighting up the void. Then it faded into ash.

The screens of Rogers' ship hummed into life, as the debris struck. Particles rained against them, and were instantly disintegrated.

"Well," Ferris said. "It's over. North will report the original scout

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mistaken. Williamson's World wasn't found. The legend will remain a legend."

Rogers continued to watch until the last bits of debris had ceased flying, and only a vague, discolored shadow remained. The screens clicked off automatically. To his right, the Class-One battleship picked up speed and headed toward the Riga System.

Williamson's World was gone. The Galactic Relay culture had been preserved. The idea, the concept of a separate culture with its own ways, its own customs, had been disposed of in the most effective possible way.

"Good job," the Relay trace web whispered. North was pleased. "The fission mines were perfectly placed. Nothing remains."

"No," Rogers agreed. "Nothing remains."

Corporal Pete Matson pushed the front door open, grinning from ear to ear. "Hi, honey! Surprise!"

"Pete!" Gloria Matson came running, throwing her arms around her husband. "What are you doing home? Pete—"

"Special leave. Forty-eight hours." Pete tossed down his suitcase triumphantly. "Hi there, kid."

His son greeted him shyly. "Hello."

Pete squatted down and opened his suitcase. "How have things been going? How's school?"

"He's had another cold," Gloria said. "He's almost over it. But what happened? Why did they—"

"Military secret." Pete fumbled in his suitcase. "Here." He held something out to his son. "I brought you something. A souvenir."

He handed his son a hand-made wooden drinking cup. The boy took it shyly and turned it around, curious and puzzled. "What's a—a *souvenir?*"

Matson struggled to express the difficult concept. "Well, it's something that reminds you of a different place. Something you don't have, where you are. You know." Matson tapped the cup. "That's to drink out of. It's sure not like our plastic cups, is it?"

"No, the child said.

"Look at this, Gloria." Pete shook out a great folded cloth from his suitcase, printed with multi-colored designs. "Picked this up cheap. You can make a skirt out of it. What do you say? Ever seen anything like it?"

"No," Gloria said, awed. "I haven't." She took the cloth and fingered it reverently.

Pete Matson beamed, as his wife and child stood clutching the souvenirs he had brought them, reminders of his excursions to distant places. Foreign lands.

"Gee," his son whispered, turning the cup around and around. A strange light glowed in his eyes. "Thanks a lot, Dad. For the—*souvenir.*"

The strange light grew.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dream damsel

by . . . Evan Hunter

A manly, handsome fellow was he, a slayer of fiery dragons. At night his true love existed for him alone. Or so he fondly imagined!

I WENT FIRST to the lady Eloise, since I was her champion, and it was only fair and knightly that she should be the first to know.

There was a fair sky overhead that day, with scudding clouds beyond the bannered towers of Camelot, and below their stately ramparts the rich green curve of the earth bending to meet the eggshell blue of the sky. We sat in the stone courtyard while an attendant played the lute, plucking gently at the strings, and I did not bid him cease because music seemed somehow fitting for the sorrow of the occasion. The lady Eloise sat with her hands folded demurely in her lap, awaiting my pleasure. I raised my visored helmet and said, "Elly . . ."

She lifted incredibly long lashes, tilting her amber eyes to mine. The bodice of her gown rose and fell with her gentle breathing. "Yes, my Lord Larimar," she said.

"I've something on my mind," I told her, "and it behooves me to give tongue to it."

"Give it tongue, then," Eloise

At twenty-eight Evan Hunter has garnered by his writing talents so fabulous a harvest of literary triumphs one wonders if Ernest Hemingway himself might not well feel a slight twinge of envy. His new novel, THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE *(Simon and Schuster) will be sponsored by an almost six-figure Hollywood contract. We're naturally pleased to bring you a first-run satirically fanciful story by a writer of such astounding ability.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. "Trippingly, I pray you."

I rose and began pacing the courtyard. I had recently jousted with Sir Mordred, and a few of my armor joints were loose, and I'm afraid I made a bit of noise as I paced. I lifted my voice above the noise and said, "As you know, I've been your champion for, lo, these many months."

"Yes, m'lord," she said.

"Many a dragon have I slain for you," I said. I gave heed to the lute music, and corrected it to, "For thee," waxing flowery to befit the occasion.

"That's true," Eloise said. "Most true, Larry."

"Yes." I nodded my head, and my helmet rattled. "And many an ogre have I sent to a dishonorable death, Elly, many a vile demon have I decapitated in thy name, wearing thy favor, charging forth to do battle upon my courageous steed, rushing over hill and dale, down valley, across stream . . ."

"Yes, m'lord," Eloise said.

"Yes. And all for thy love, Elly, all for thy undying love."

"Yes, Larry?" she said, puzzled.

"Arthur himself has seen fit to honor me for my undaunting courage, my unwavering valor. I carry now, among others, the Medal of the Sainted Slayer, the *Croix de Tête de Dragon*, and even . . ."

"Yes?" Eloise asked excitedly.

"Even," I said modestly, "the much coveted Clustered Blueberry Sprig."

"You are very brave," Eloise said, lowering her lashes, "and a most true knight, m'lord."

"Fie," I shouted over the music of the lute, "I come not to speak of bravery. For what is bravery?" I snapped my gauntleted fingers. "Bravery is naught!"

"Naught, m'lord?"

"Naught. I come because I must speak my mind, else I cannot live with honor or keep my peace with mine ownself."

"Thine ownself? Speak then, m'lord," Eloise said, "and trippingly, pray you."

"I desire," I said, "to call it quits."

"Sir?"

"Quits. Finis. *Pfttt.*"

"*Pfttt,* m'lord?"

"Pfttt, Elly."

"I see."

"It is not that I do not love thee, Elly," I said. "Perish the thought."

"Perish it," she said.

"For you are lovely and fair and true and constant and a rarity among women. And I am truly nothing when compared to thee."

"True," Eloise said, nodding her head. "That's true."

"So it is not that I do not love thee. It is that . . ."

I paused because my visor fell over my face.

"Yes?"

I lifted the visor. "It is that I love another better than thee."

"Oh."

"Yes."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Guinivere?" she asked. "Has that wench . . ."

"Nay, not Guinivere, our beloved queen."

"Elaine then? Elaine the fair, Elaine the . . ."

"Nay, nor is it Elaine."

"Pray who then, pray?"

"The lady Agatha."

"The lady who?"

"Agatha."

"I know of no maiden named Agatha. Are you jesting with me, my Lord Larimar? Do you pull my maidenly leg?"

"Nay. There is an Agatha, Elly, and I do love her, and she doth love me, and we do intend to join our plights in holy matrimony."

"I see," Eloise said.

"I have therefore petitioned Arthur to release me from my vows concerning thee, Eloise. I tell you this now because it would not be fair if I am to marry Agatha, which I fully intend doing, to maintain me as a champion when my heart would elsewhere be."

"I see," Eloise said again.

"Yes. I hope you understand, Elly. I hope we can still be friends."

"Of course," Eloise said, smiling weakly. "And I suppose you'll want your Alpha Beta Tau pin back."

"Keep it," I said magnanimously. And then, to show how magnanimous I really was, I reached into my tunic and said, "Ho, lute player! Here are a pair of dragon ears for thee, for thy fine music!"

The lute player dropped to the stones and kissed both my feet, and I smiled graciously.

I killed two small dragons that day, catching the second one with my mace before he'd even had a chance to breathe any fire upon me. I cut off their heads and slung them over my jeweled saddle and then rode back to the shining spires of Camelot. Launcelot and Guinivere were just leaving for their afternoon constitutional, so I waved at them and then took my gallant steed to the stables where I left him with my squire, a young boy named Gawain.

I wandered about a bit, watching Merlin playing pinochle with some unsuspecting knight trainees, and then stopping to pass the time of day with Galahad, a fellow I've never enjoyed talking to because his white armor and helmet are so blinding in the sun. Besides, he is a bit of a braggart, and I soon tired of his talk and went to eat a small lunch of roast pheasant, lamb mutton, cheese, bread, wine, nuts, apples, and grapes, topping it off with one of Arthur's best cigars.

I went back to the stables after lunch to get my gallant steed, and then I rode in the jousting exercises, knocking Mordred for a row of beer barrels, and being in turn knocked head over teacups by Launcelot, whose ride with Guinivere seemed to have done him well.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I gathered myself together afterwards, and was leading my horse back to the stables when Arthur caught up with me.

"Larry!" he called, "Ho there, Larry! Wait up!"

I stopped and waited for Arthur to come alongside, and I said, "What's up, beloved king?"

"Just what I wanted to ask you, Larry," he said, blowing out a tremendous cloud of cigar smoke. "What *is* all this nonsense?"

"What nonsense, my liege?"

"About wanting to break your champion vows. Now, hell, Larry, that just isn't done, and you know it."

"It's the only honorable thing to do, Art," I said.

"Honor, shmonor," Arthur answered. "I'm thinking of the paper work involved. These dispensations are a pain in the neck, Larry. After all, you should have thought of this when you took the vows. Any knight . . ."

"I'm sorry, Art," I said, "but it's the only way. I've given it a lot of thought, believe me."

"But I don't understand," Arthur said, blowing some more smoke at me. "What's wrong between you and Elly? Now, she's a damn fine kid, Larry, and I hope . . ."

"She *is* a damn fine kid," I agreed, "but it's all off between us."

"Why?"

"I've found another damsel."

"This Agatha? Now look, Larry, this is old Artie you're talking to, and not some kid still wet behind the ears. Now you know as well as I do that there's no Agatha in my court, so how . . ."

"I know that, Art. I never said she was in your court."

"But you call her the Lady Agatha!" Arthur said.

"I know."

"A foreign broad?" Arthur asked.

"No. A dream damsel."

"A *what?*"

"A dream damsel. I dream her."

"Now, what was that again, Larry?"

"I dream her. I dream the Lady Agatha."

"That's what I thought you . . . say, Larry, did Launcelot hurt you today during the joust? He plays rough, that fellow, and I've been meaning to . . ."

"No, he didn't hurt me at all. Few ribs, but nothing serious. I really do dream my lady, Art."

"You mean at night? When you're asleep."

"Aye."

"You mean you just think her up?"

"Aye."

"Yes you. Do you think her up?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you."

"Then she isn't real?" Arthur asked.

"Oh, she's real all right. Not during the day, of course, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when I dream her up at night, she's real as can be."

"Foo," Arthur said. "This is all nonsense. Now you get back to Elly and tell her . . ."

"No, my leige," I said. "I intend to marry the lady Agatha."

"But she's only a dream!" Arthur protested.

"Not *only* a dream, noble king. Much more than a dream to me. A woman of flesh and blood. A woman who loves me truly, and whom I do truly love."

"Fie," Arthur said. "You're being absurd. I'll send Merlin around to say a few incantations over you. You're probably bewitched."

"Nay, my lord, I'm not bewitched. I dream the lady Agatha of my own accord. There's no enchantment whatever attached to it."

"No enchantment, eh? Perhaps you've been taking to the grape then, Larry? Perhaps the enchantment is all in a cup?"

"Nay, that neither. I tell you I dream her of my own accord."

Arthur puffed on his cigar again. "How on earth do you do that?"

"It's really quite simple," I said. "I set me down on my couch, and I close my eyes, and I visualize a damsel with blonde hair and blue eyes, and lips like the blushing rose, and skin like Oriental ivory. Carmine nails, like pointed drops of blood, and an hourglass waist. A voice like the brush of velvet, flanks like a good horse in joust, a wit as sharp as any pike, a magic as potent as Merlin's. That is my lady Agatha, Art. I visualize her and then I fall asleep, and she materializes."

"She . . . materializes," Arthur said, stroking his beard.

"Aye. And she loves me."

"You?" Arthur asked, examining me with scrutiny.

"Yes, me." I paused. "What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, nothing," Arthur said hastily. "But tell me, Larry, how do you plan on marrying her? I mean, a dream, after all . . ."

"Look at it this way, Art," I said. "During the daytime, I go to work anyway. There's always another dragon to kill, or some giant to fell, and ogres by the dozen Lord knows, not to mention other assorted monsters of various sizes and shapes, and maidens in distress, and sea serpents, and . . . oh, you know. You've been in the business much longer than I."

"So?"

"So what does a man need a wife for during the daytime? He'd never get to see her anyway. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," Arthur said, "but . . ."

"Therefore, I'll marry the lady Agatha and see her at night, when most knights see their wives anyway. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if that's why they're called knights, Art."

"But how do you propose to marry her? Who will . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I shall dream a friar, and he shall marry us."

"I do believe you've been slaying too many dragons, my Lord Larimar," Arthur said. "After all, your dream girl—in all fairness—doesn't sound any lovelier than the fair Eloise."

I poked the king in the ribs and said, "Art, you're just getting old, that's all."

"Maybeso, boy," he reflected, "but I think I'll send Merlin around, anyway. Few incantations never hurt anyone."

"Art, please . . ."

"He's salaried," Arthur said, and so I conceded . . .

Merlin and Eloise came to me together, he looking very wise and very magical in his pointed hat and flowing robes; she looking very sad and very lovely, though not as lovely as my lady Agatha.

"Tell me," Merlin said, "all about your dream damsel."

"What is there to tell?"

"Well, what does she look like?"

"She's blonde . . ."

"Um-huh, then we shall need some condor livers," Merlin said.

"And blue-eyed," I went on.

"Then we'll need a few dragon eggs, pastel-hued."

"And . . . oh, she's very lovely."

"I see," Merlin said wisely. "And do you love her?"

"I do indeed."

"And she you?" he asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"Verily."

"She truthfully loves thee?"

"Of course."

"She is lovely you say, and she loves—forgive me—*thee?*"

"Why, yes," I said.

"She loves . . . *thee?*"

"Three times already has she loved me, and still you do not hear? Turn up your hearing aid, wizard," I said.

"Forgive me," Merlin said, shaking his head. "I just . . ."

"She has told me upon many an occasion that I am just what she has been waiting for," I said. "Tall, manly, bold, courageous and very handsome!"

"She said these things about *you?*" Merlin asked.

"Yes, of course."

"That you were the man she waited for? That you were . . . tall?"

"Yes."

"And . . . and manly?"

"Yes."

Merlin coughed, perhaps first realizing how tall and manly I really was. "And . . . and . . ." he coughed again ". . . handsome?"

"All those," I said.

Merlin continued coughing until I thought he would choke. "And all those she waited for, and all those she found in . . ." He coughed again. ". . . *you?*"

"And why not, wizard?" I asked.

"You are truly bewitched, Lord Larimar," he said, "truly."

He pulled back the sleeve of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

robe, and spread his fingers wide, and then he said, *"Alla-bah-roo-muh-jig-bah-roo, zing, zatch, zootch!"*

I listened to the incantation and I yawned. But apparently Eloise was taking all this nonsense to heart because she stared at Merlin wide-eyed, looking lovely but not so lovely as my lady Agatha, and then she looked at me, and her eyes got wider and wider and wider . . .

Oh, there was so much to do in preparation. My dispensation from Arthur came through the next week, and I went about busily making plans for my wedding to Agatha. I wanted to dream up something really special, something that would never be forgotten as long as England had a history. I wanted a big wedding, and so I had to plan beforehand so that I could dream it all up in one night, which was no easy task.

I wanted to dream up the entire court on white stallions, their shields blazing, their swords held high to catch the gleaming rays of the sun, the gallery packed with damsels in pink and white and the palest blue. I wanted to dream the banners of Camelot fluttering in green and yellow and orange over the towers, with a pale sky beyond, and a mild breeze blowing. I wanted to dream a friar who would be droll and yet serious, chucklingly fat, but piously religious.

And most of all, I wanted to dream the lady Agatha in her wedding gown, a fine thing of lace and pearls, with a low bodice and a hip-hugging waist. All these things I wanted to dream, and they had to be planned beforehand. So what with slaying dragons and ogres and planning for the wedding, I was a fairly busy young knight, and I didn't get around to visiting Eloise again until the night before the wedding.

Her lady-in-waiting was most cordial.

"My mistress is asleep," she said.

"Asleep?" I glanced at my hour glass. "Why, it's only four minutes past six."

"She has been retiring early of late," the woman said.

"Poor child," I said, wagging my head. "Her heart is doubtless breaking. Ah well, *c'est la guerre.*"

"C'est," the woman said.

"When she awakes on the morrow, tell her I am going to dream her a seat of honor at the wedding. Tell her. She will be pleased."

"Sir?"

"Just tell her. She'll understand."

"Yes, sir."

"Matter of fact," I said, "I'd better get to bed myself. Want to practice up. I've a lot to dream tomorrow night."

"Sir?"

"Never mind," I said. I reached into my tunic and said, "Here's a dragon's tooth for lending a kind ear."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I ripped the tooth from my hourglass fob and deposited it in her excitedly overwhelmed, shaking, grateful palm.

Then I went home and to bed and to dream of my lady Agatha.

I went first to the lady Eloise on the morrow, since it was only fair and knightly that she should be the first to know. I did not raise my visor for I did not desire her to see my face.

"Elly," I said, "I've got something on my mind, and it behooves me to give tongue to it."

"Give it tongue, then," Eloise said. "Trippingly, pray you."

"It's all off," I told her. "The lady Agatha and me. We're through. She called it quits."

"Quits?" Eloise said. "Finis? *Pfttt?*"

"Even so," I said.

"Really now," Eloise said, smiling.

"There's someone else, Elly. My lady Agatha has someone else. Someone taller, manlier, handsomer. I know it's hard to believe. But there is someone else, someone who just came along . . . suddenly."

"How terrible for you," Eloise said happily.

"Yes. I can't understand it. He just popped up, just like that, right there beside her. I . . . I saw him, Elly, a big handsome knight on a white horse. Right there in my dream, I saw him."

"Did you really?" Eloise asked sadly, clapping her hands together.

"Yes," I said. "So she wants him, and not me. So I thought, if you'll still have me, Elly, if you'll still take me as your champion..."

"Well . . ."

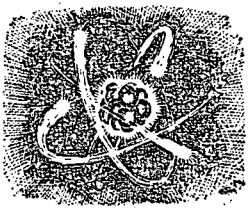
". . . and perhaps someday as your husband, then . . ."

Eloise stepped forward, and there was a twinkle in her eye when she lifted my visor.

"You're tall and manly and handsome enough for me, you goof," she said. I looked at her and suddenly remembered that she'd been doing an awful lot of sleeping lately, and I started to say, "Hey!"

But she wrapped her arms around my armor and kissed me soundly on the mouth, and all I could do was stare at her in wonder and murmur, "Eloise! I never dreamed!"

Eloise smiled secretly and said, *"I* did."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conquerors' planet

by . . . Robert Sheckley

They were singularly revolting folk—primitives with a twisted outlook on life. How could they logically defeat a man like Ewick?

THE SHIP BLASTED off as soon as Ewick had unloaded his luggage. Ewick stood watching it until it disappeared in the sky, feeling a little sorry about leaving it. The spacemen were a grand bunch, and the atmosphere of the cruise had been chummy and informal. Like a club, he thought...

He lifted his bags off the spongy ground, and started for Colonial House, his cat, Fluff, following close at his heels. He had smuggled her on board with the crew's help. The Colonial Bureau didn't approve of pets on primitive worlds, but he had to have some sort of physical link with Earth. There would be no other companionship on this little mudball of a planet.

He had anticipated a welcoming committee, and was not surprised when the natives came forward to meet him. They were bunched together as closely as they could get, snarling at the ones nearest them. Obviously they detested each other, and just as obviously needed the security of the pack.

The newer trends in science fiction often point up brilliantly those fascinating aspects of primitive human behavior which make a travesty of all logic. "I'm happiest when I starve," said the witch doctor of this story. Sheckley has a mordant gift for portraying the stark lunacy of primitives on other worlds, turning that lunacy into high comedy, and then jolting and sobering you with a surprise twist as startling as a thunderclap in January.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Greetings, Master," one of them said, in a tone so supercharged with hate that Ewick looked at him closely. Under that searching scrutiny, the native faded quickly back into the pack. But it didn't matter. They all looked alike. A stunted, gray-skinned, bearded little people, wide of mouth, and narrow of eye.

Handsome fellows, Ewick thought ironically, rubbing his smooth chin.

"Here, take my bags," he said, dropping his luggage. It was no sale. The natives remained welded together in a mob. He had to single out specific ones before he got any action.

Trudging along with Fluff at his side, Ewick permitted himself a wan smile. The Colonial Bureau had really picked a spot for him, on the planet Selge! Overhead the sky was dark with thunder-heads, the air thick and moist. On Earth it would be raining within five minutes, with such a sky. Here, the rain wouldn't fall for months. But the clouds would hang there forever, threatening.

Well, it could be worse, he reminded himself. He might have been given a fever world, or some other danger spot. There were places in the Colonial Administration where a man was fortunate if he lived out his tour of duty.

Here, he would face no greater danger than tripping over his own feet. And after a year, he would be able to move on to a better berth. A city job, perhaps, where he could bring Janet.

"Just drop them there," he said when they reached Colonial House.

The Selgens did so with alacrity, and moved back into the crowd. Ewick opened the door for Fluff, who seemed content to curl on the front steps, and went inside.

Colonial House, administrative headquarters for the planet Selge, was a seven room bungalow. It had sleeping quarters for three men, the normal complement on Selge before Colonial Bureau had cut it to one.

Ewick picked the largest bedroom, and began to unpack. He hung his clothes in the closet, humming to himself. The glossy picture of Janet, his wife, went on the stand by the bed. Another smaller picture he put on the bureau. It showed a pretty, dark-haired girl clinging to the arm of a smiling young man. The young man was in a tight, starched Colonial Bureau uniform. Thus Ewick had courted romance once on an elm-shaded campus five years ago, on his graduation from the Academy.

Only five years, he thought, and already he was administering an entire planet by himself. True, it wasn't much of a planet. A liability to Earth, rather than an asset. But it *was* all his. It showed that his superiors had confidence in him.

"You are no more than a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

louse," a voice said outside his window.

"And you are a miserable worm," another voice answered.

Looking out, Ewick saw two Selgens talking. That was how they conversed on this planet. In his indoctrination lecture he had been told that the Selgens were the meanest, stupidest people in the inhabited universe. They would be dangerous, if they weren't such incredible cowards.

"I would like to see you starving, your tongue hanging out," the first voice said. "I would spit, and walk by."

"Ah, to find you ground up into little bits," the second replied.

And that, Ewick knew, was what passed for a pleasant exchange of friendly greetings.

He'd really have to do a paper on these people. Something with a title like, *The Insult As A Form Of Polite Address Among The Selgens.*

He unpacked his books, stacking them methodically on the bureau. He had brought quite a few, because this Selgen year would afford him a wonderful opportunity to catch up on his studies. Chemistry was his weak point, and he was determined to master it. It would help his advancement.

"I detest everyone," the first voice said. "But I detest you the most."

Ewick unpacked his carbine and assembled it, leaning the weapon against the wall. He decided that he had been foolish to bring it. Selge had no game worth speaking of, and the natives were a cowardly, disorganized lot. He'd have to oil and sand the barrel constantly or it would rust in this humid place.

"Oh, if only I had words to tell you how much I hate you," the second voice said. "I hate you even more than an Outsider."

Ewick grinned at their stupidity. The Selgen's were really unique in the universe. When a Colonial expedition had first landed on the planet, the natives had been starving, because they hated each other too much to cooperate in farming. Earth had given them administrators, to keep them at work. Without Earth's intervention, the Selgens would have died out.

But the damned fools hated Earthmen even more than they detested each other.

Pleasant little people, Ewick thought.

"Get to work," he called out the window.

The natives drifted off, with an ironic chorus of "Yes, Master." He'd have to tell them to stop that. His title was Administrator.

Ewick came to the door, ready to start his first day's administering. Fluff, his cat, had found a small, scraggly native animal, but was walking serenely past, ignoring it.

"Good for you, kitty," Ewick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. He walked down to the fields . . .

The next two weeks were filled with frustration. The Selgens seemed to have forgotten everything the previous administrators had taught them. Ewick had to start from scratch, explaining the theory of farming and its importance to them.

The Selgens grinned and cursed, and did their best to ignore him. Finally, he got them to work in the fields, and things began to straighten out. The Selgens were unwillingly producing the food that kept them alive, and Ewick watched them, making sure they didn't cheat themselves.

He had decided that a good sociological paper on the Selgens would show his superiors that he was alert, and definitely aid his career. One day he took paper and pen with him to the fields.

"Tell me," he said to a bearded old Selgen, laboriously hoeing a corner of the field, "why do you all speak English?" It was a point that his lectures hadn't made clear.

The native glared at him. "Master," he said, "before the Earthmen came we spoke many, many different languages. Every family had their own language. *I* had my own language, which no one else in the world could speak, not even my wife." He looked at Ewick proudly.

"Then how did you talk?" Ewick asked. "Did you learn someone else's language?"

"I didn't speak to anyone," the Selgen said proudly. "I would never learn the tongue of an inferior. And *they* wouldn't either." He gestured contemptuously toward the rest of the workers. "It was less of an insult to learn the Earthman's tongue, since you Earthmen are Outsiders."

"You don't like Outsiders?"

"No, Master. I hate The People, but even more I hate Outsiders."

"Don't call me master," Ewick said. "My title is Administrator."

He jotted down notes while the native worked. It seemed impossible for a people to be so singularly unappetizing, so amazingly uncooperative. He watched, while the native made vague motions with his hoe, barely scratching the ground.

"Put your back into it," Ewick urged. "Have you got any fraternal organizations?"

"Any what, Master?"

Ewick explained.

"No, Master. We are all one. We are The People. But no one likes anyone else well enough to be with."

"Then why do you call yourselves The People? Are you proud of that?"

"No!" the old Selgen replied, and spat on the ground. "I detest all my people. But still, we are better than any others. We are better than Outsiders."

"Like the Masters?" Ewick asked.

The native didn't answer, which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Ewick seemed answer enough.

"Come on, get at it," Ewick said. These people had the damnedest twisted logic he had ever listened to. If there ever was a psychotic race, he decided, this was it.

"Harder, dig!" he insisted because the native was barely scratching the soil.

Ewick walked on. He watched for a while, then realized that no one was working! They were tapping the earth with their hoes, going through the motions, watching to make sure they weren't doing more work than anyone else.

"Get the hell to work, damn it!" Ewick roared. It infuriated him to realize that if they didn't get the seeds in there would be no crops. If there were no crops—Colonial would blame him, of course.

"Yes, Master," the natives chorused in their mocking voices, and went back to scratching the soft earth.

"And don't call me that." He would really have a paper to write on these creatures, he told himself. They seemed to be one big in-group, brothers in hate, with himself and Fluff in the out-group.

"Come on, hit that ground." He searched his mind for a threat, then remembered that primitives were usually superstitious.

"If you don't work, the devils will come down and grab you."

The Selgens grinned at him. One of them spat on the ground.

"What's the matter?" Ewick asked.

"There are no devils, Master," a native said.

"Nor are there any gods," another piped in.

"There can be nothing greater than myself," the first said. "Nothing in the universe."

"You lying toad!" another shouted. "There is nothing greater than I! How could there be?"

The two glared at each other, swinging their hoes ominously.

"Take it easy," Ewick said.

"Horrible beast!"

"Mass of lice!"

They danced up and down in rage, waving their spades and hoes, but taking care not to hit one another. Ewick knew from his indoctrination lectures that the natives would never use violence. They were too cowardly, too afraid of retaliation.

"And you—you are a rat also!" another native said suddenly to one beside him.

The air was filled with waving hoes; carefully waving hoes, for not a Selgen was touched.

"Stop it!" Ewick roared. "Stop it, you damned fools!"

The natives stopped, and favored him with a communal wave of hate.

"Although I detest you," one said to another, "I detest the Master even more."

"We are united in that, you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

despicable animal," the native answered.

"Get back to work," Ewick shouted, trembling with rage.

He walked back to Colonial House. Outside the door, Fluff was sunning herself, snarling occasionally at the native animals when they came too close. Ewick went inside and closed the door.

He tried to rest, but the humidity was impossible. He sat down, took his chemistry book and tried to study.

Oxidation is an algebraic increase in the oxidation number of an element, and, therefore, involves a loss of electrons by the element oxidized. Conversely, an element is reduced when its oxidation number is decreased, and, therefore, its atoms—

Impossible. The words didn't make any sense to him. Valences, oxidations. Wasn't that what was happening to his rifle? The barrel was pitted deeply with rust. Ewick tried to figure out why. Oxygen combining with the iron, forming ferrous oxide, was that it? Or was it ferric oxide?

Anyhow, there was a hell of a lot of air and damned little steel. So the air was taking over. Not that he could pass a chem exam with an answer like that.

He threw down the book in disgust. It was too hot and sticky to read, and he was too upset. He stretched out on the bed, looking at the picture of his wife.

At least, he thought, scratching the stubble on his chin, at least *she's* waiting for me. Of course, it was partly her fault that he was here. If she hadn't been so infernally ambitious for him.

Outside the clouds were thick with rain that refused to fall. The natives worked and cursed . . .

Ewick sweated ten pounds off his lean frame, standing over the Selgens and shouting them back to work. A thousand of them did in a week what would take three Earthmen a day.

By shouting, roaring and bullying, he got them to dig the fields and plant the crops. The Selgens continued calling him Master, because they knew how much it annoyed him.

Ewick's mention of the devils was the greatest possible joke for the atheistic Selgens, who were unable to conceive anything greater than themselves. They took immense pleasure in pointing out the stupidity of Ewick's ways.

After a month of this, Ewick gave up taking notes in the field.

The idea of being schooled in sophistry by a pack of illiterates almost drove him to distraction. After another month he had to hold himself in check. He had the overpowering urge to smash a few faces every time he went into the fields.

Then the natives found something else to bother him with.

"Where are your women?" he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked a Selgen one day, just out of curiosity.

"Our women, Master, are in the village, brewing evil," the native told him.

"Don't call me master. I suppose you consider women beneath you?" Ewick asked, with what he hoped was an air of scientific detachment.

"Women, Master, are scum." The native watched Ewick's face and smiled.

"Not only The Women—all women, Master, on all planets. Women cause a man to die early. Women, Master—" The native went on, dripping his venom.

A month ago, Ewick would have laughed it off. Now it made him distinctly uncomfortable.

"And what is *your* woman doing now, Master?" the native asked suddenly.

"None of your damned business," Ewick said.

"Ah!" The native grinned evilly. "I quite understand, Master."

"There isn't anything to understand!" Ewick shouted. "My wife is on Earth, where she belongs."

"Of course, Master," the native said with a knowing smile.

"You damned—" Ewick choked himself off, and hurried away. The hatred of the natives followed, like a roaring tide.

He slammed the door violently. Fluff leaped off a chair and ran into another room. The cat had been avoiding him lately.

He went into his bedroom, took a piece of sandpaper and started to work on the barrel of his carbine. It was deeply pitted with rust now, inside and outside. Worthless.

He threw it down and started pacing the floor. Outside he heard the voices of the natives.

"All other races are detestable. There is only one race. The People!"

"I hate and abhor The People. But I hate Outsiders more. At least, we are The People!"

"Shut up!" Ewick screamed at the window. He threw his chemistry book against the wall. To hell with valences and interchange of atoms. He wanted out of this detestable place, before he slaughtered a few thousand Selgens.

The rain clouds were thicker now, great with rain, waiting to explode. But they still waited, and no drop fell.

Ewick thought of all the natives on the planet, millions of them, all hating him, abhoring the Outsider. They were the in-group; hating, but still a group. And he was alone.

By God, he thought, how dare they hate me? Me, an Earthman!

And then he remembered that the natives didn't believe in God.

In four months the seeds were all planted, and the green sprouts were starting to grow in the fields. Ewick had to work twice as hard now, forcing the natives to weed the furrows.

"Let's go there," he said, his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

voice hoarse from months of shouting.

"Will the Master's God destroy us if we don't?" a native asked with heavy irony.

"Forget it," Ewick said. "But get to work."

Fluff scampered by, running with three of the native animals. "Here, puss," Ewick called in his rough, tired voice. Fluff ignored him. She had struck up a wary friendship with the animals, and had taken to sleeping out.

"Don't leave the weeds in the fields," Ewick pleaded. "They'll just take root again." He raised a tired hand and pointed to a native. "You. Carry these weeds off."

The native unwillingly picked up a handful, dropping most of them before he reached the edge of the field.

"That's the stuff." Ewick detested the Selgens as strongly as ever, but the bursting anger of the first months had passed. He was too tired now, too sick of being hated. "Keep it up," he said.

"Oh, of course, Master," a mocking voice said. Ewick didn't bother turning. He let them go an hour early, and walked back to Colonial House.

In the house, he decided not to shave. It was too much trouble, and there was no reason why he shouldn't wear a beard. He went into the kitchen and opened a can of corned beef.

Eating it, he wondered if his stomach would hold Selgen food. He was sick of canned diet.

He went to the door and called Fluff, but she didn't come. He called again, and the cat appeared from a tangle of underbrush. She snarled at him, and disappeared.

The cat had left his group, he thought.

Ewick went back to the bedroom. The plase was a mess. He rarely bothered to clean it these days. He picked up the moldy chemistry book, dusted the cover and placed it on top of Janet's picture, face-down on the bureau. He straightened the blanket on his bed, and stumbled over the carbine. Bending over, he picked it up by the muzzle.

The barrel, corroded through, snapped when he lifted it.

"Oh Master," a voice said outside. "May we return to our hated women?"

"Yes," Ewick said. "Do anything you please. And stop calling me master."

"All right," the native said.

Ewick was startled. The native hadn't called him master that time. Was there a change in attitude? Ewick wasn't sure, but he thought he could sense it. They hated him, true. But he must have proved himself. He didn't sense the true, deep bitter hatred of the in-group for the out.

He was in, he thought, and smiled without a trace of irony.

And only six months to go.

Outside, the thick, bulging storm clouds finally broke, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fields were drenched with water.

At the end of the year the relief ship came, landing on its blossom of flame. All the natives came forward to meet it. Ewick went with them, surrounded by them, hating them.

The ship's door opened, and a young Earthman came out, suitcase in hand. He smiled uncertainly, looking over the group. Then he saw Ewick.

"Hello there," he said. "You must be Ewick. I'm your relief. Joe Svenson. Say, this is quite a welcoming committee!"

"Greetings, Master," Ewick said to the Outsider, safe in the pack of his hated brothers.

if *you want the greatest possible variety within the entire range of fantasy and science fiction by the most imaginative and capable writers, the old favorites and new discoveries . . . .* Buy FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

if *you want to discuss with your friends the exciting new stories in every breathtakingly new issue while they, too, are still under the enchanting spell of its prophetic magic . . . .* Buy FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

if *tables of contents multiple-starred with the names of such greats as Lester del Rey, Philip José Farmer, Richard Matheson, Philip K. Dick, Margaret St. Clair, Frank Belknap Long, Poul Anderson, William Morrison, Robert Sheckley, give you an anticipatory thrill* Buy FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

if *timeliness is a justifiably important factor in your reading enjoyment and delay is frustrating at best . . . if you are having trouble finding* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *on your newsstand, and you want to be sure of getting us regularly and on time . . .*

THEN . . . just clip the coupon and mail it to us—with your check or money order—and FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *will arrive on schedule.*

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.
Kindly enter my subscription for FANTASTIC UNIVERSE.
☐ 6 issues at $2.00 ☐ 12 issues at $3.75

Name .....

Address .....

City, Zone, State .....

Please print FU 23

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wounded

by . . . Philip José Farmer

Women wondered how he could be so cruel—and so utterly charming.

THOSE POLAROID GLASSES they give you at the 3-D movies were the cause of my downfall.

When the show was over I went into the lobby and stood there a moment while I studied my schedule. I was supposed to go to a big party given by one of the prime numbers of the Four Hundred. I didn't have an invitation, but that never bothered me. Biggest gate-crasher in the world, that's me.

I heard a gasp and looked up to see this beautiful young woman staring at me. She had forgotten to take off her 3-D glasses and that, I instantly realized, was the trouble. Somehow, the polarization was just right to make me visible. Or let's say that I was always visible but nobody recognized me.

The view she got enabled her eyes to make that subtle but necessary shift and see me as I really am.

I thought, *I'd have to tell Mother about this.* Then I walked out fast. I ignored her calls—she

The winged and shining fancy that hovers wiht irony-tipped talons about the writings of Philip José Farmer needs no introduction to our pages. We can no longer hail him as a brilliant new discovery, for in two short years he has become an established writer with a widely discussed novel to his credit. It seems peculiarly appropriate that the author of THE LOVERS *should grace his present theme with a wit barbed so entrancingly.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even addressed me by the right name, though the accent was wrong—and I hopped into a taxi with my violin case under my arm. I told the cabbie to lose the taxi in which she was tailing me. He did, or seemed to.

As soon as I entered the penthouse, a house detective seized my arm. I pointed to the violin case under my arm. His piggish eyes roved over it as he munched upon a sandwich he held in his other hand. He was one of the wounded, always eating to stuff the ache and the hollowness of it.

"Listen, kid," he said, "aren't you sort of young to be playing in an orchestra?"

"I'm older than you think," I replied. "Besides, I'm not connected with this orchestra."

"Oh, a soloist, heh? A child prodigy, heh?"

He was being sarcastic as many of the wounded are. I could pass for twenty-five any day or night.

"You might call me that," I said truthfully.

"One of our hostess' cute little surprises, heh?" he growled, jerking a thumb at the tall middle-aged woman standing in the middle of a group of guests.

She happened at that moment to be looking at her husband. He had a beautiful young thing backed into a corner and was talking in a very intimate manner to her.

The light was just right so I could see the flash of green deep within my hostess' eyes. It was the green of a long-festering wound.

Her husband was one of my casualties, too, but his clothing covered the swelling of the injured spot. The girl he was talking to was pretty, but she was one of the half-dead. Before the party was over, however, she would come to life with the shock of pain. When I hit them, they know it.

I glanced around at the party-goers, many of whom exhibited the evidences of their wounds like the medieval beggars who hoped to win sympathy and alms by thrusting their monstrous deformities under your nose.

There was the financier whose face-twisting tic was supposed to spring from worry over business. I alone knew that it wasn't business that caused it, that he looked to his wife for healing, and she wouldn't give it to him.

And there was the thin-lipped woman whose wound was the worst of all, because she couldn't feel it and would not even admit it existed. But I could see her hurt in the disapproving looks she gave to those who drank, who laughed loudly, who spilled cigarette ashes on the rug, who said anything not absolutely out of Mrs. Grundy. I could read it in the tongue she used as a file across the nerves of her husband.

I wandered around a while, drinking champagne and listening to the conversation of the wounded and the unwounded. It was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same as it was in the beginning of my profession, a feverish interest in themselves on the part of the unwounded and a feverish interest in their healers on the part of the wounded.

After a while, just as I was about to open my violin case and go to work, I saw the young woman enter—the one who had recognized me. She still had the 3-D glasses. She carried them in her hand now, but she put them on to glance around the room. It was just my luck for her to be one of the invited. I tried to evade her search but she was persistent.

She swept triumphantly towards me finally. She carried a large cardboard box in her arms. She halted in front of me and set the box at her feet. Certain she could identify me from now on, she then removed her glasses.

She was very beautiful, healthy-looking, and with no outward signs of her wounds.

If it hadn't been that her eyes were so bright I'd have thought she was one of the half-dead. But there was no mistaking the phosphorescent glow of the warm wound deep within her eyes.

I glanced at my watch and said coolly, "What's on your mind, Miss?"

"I'm in love with you!" She said it breathlessly.

I had trouble suppressing a groan. "Why?" I said, though I knew well enough.

"You're the one who did it!" she replied. "Did you think that, recognizing you, I would ever let you go?"

"What do you want me to do about it?"

"Marry me."

"That'd be no good for you," I said. "I would never be at home. I keep all kinds of hours. Your life would be worse than that of the wife of any traveling salesman. Besides," I added, "I don't love you."

Usually that floors them. But not this one. She rocked with the punch and calmly pointed at my violin case.

"You can remedy that," she said.

"Why in Hades should I? Do you think any sane person would deliberately hurt himself in that manner?"

"Am I not desirable?" she asked. "Would I not be good to come home to? Don't you often long for somebody you can talk to, somebody who will get your meals and listen to your troubles, somebody who *cares?*"

Well, of course I've heard those exact words a billion or more times before. Not that they were always directed at me. Nevertheless, there was nothing new in them.

"And," she repeated, "am I not desirable?"

"Yes," I said, looking at my wristwatch and getting uneasy because of the delay. "But that has nothing to do with it. When my marriage was annulled—oh, some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where back in the eighteenth century, or was it the sixteenth—I swore by all the gods I'd never marry again. Moreover, Mother says I'm too busy . . ."

"Are you man or mouse?" she flashed.

"Neither!" I flashed back. "Besides, Mother is my employer. What would I do if she fired me? Become like one of those?"

I glanced contemptuously at the guests.

She knew what I was thinking, for she cried, "Look at me! I'm wounded! But am I like them? Am I one of the halt, the lame, the blind? Am I like that detective who swells himself into a gross human balloon because he stuffs the growing void of his hurt with food?

"Am I like our hostess, whose green wound caused her to drive away two husbands because it festered so deep she went into a delirium of unfounded imaginings about them? And then got a third who fulfilled the image she'd built up of the first two?

"And am I like that thin-lipped woman who deep-freezes her wound because she is mortally afraid of pain? And do I behave as some of these women here who throw themselves at every man who might give temporary healing, all the while knowing deep within them that the wound will become more poisonous?

"Is it my fault if most of these people don't cultivate their wounds, if they grow sickly and twisted and ill-smelling plants from them instead of the lovely and colorful and sweet flower that grows in me?"

She seized my shoulders, said, "Look me in the eye! Can you see what *you* and you *alone*, did? Is it disgusting, gangrenous? Or is it beautiful? And if it does turn poisonous, whose fault is it? Who refused to heal me?"

Her eloquence was overwhelming. I trembled. I wasn't affected when I overheard other wounded addressing their potential healers thus. But when *I* was talked to in such a manner, I shook, and I remembered the early days when my first wife and I had tended each other's injuries.

"Sorry," I mumbled, abashed before this raging yet tender mortal. "I must be going."

"No you don't!" she said firmly. She stopped and lifted the lid from the paper box. I saw it was crammed with those damned 3-D glasses.

"After I tailed you here," she said, "I returned to that theater and bought a hundred tickets and with them got these. Now, if you don't come with me where we can at least talk, I'll pass them out and everybody will see you for what you are. And don't think for a moment that those who've suffered because of you won't tear you limb from limb and string you up to the highest chandelier!"

"Nonsense," I mumbled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I felt suddenly shaky. And so unnerved was I that I rushed away from her and out into the hall. All I wanted to do was to get into the elevator, alone and unobserved, and speed away with the speed of light, half way around the world.

Do you know, I think that that clever young wench had planned that very move? She knew I'd be so upset, I'd forget my violin case. For, as I stood fretting before the elevator door, she stepped into the hall and called, "Lover!"

I turned—then I screamed, "No! No!" I backed away, my hands spread despairingly before me.

No use. The bow she'd taken from my case strummed. The arrow struck me in the heart . . .

Later, when I tried to explain to Mother, I found myself forced to defend myself against her contention that I had *wanted* the mortal to wound me, that I was putting my own selfish desires above my duties to her and our profession. My argument was weakened by my secret belief that she might be right.

Mother raged, but my clever wife—these modern women!—showed Mother that she and her son could not alone keep up with the expanding population. A good part of the world belonged to the half-dead, and they would continue to take it over unless we got some speed and efficiency into our work.

Mother became convinced. That is why I now have so many helpers—hired through a detective agency—and why we all now carry sub-machine guns in our violin cases instead of the picturesque but obsolete bow.

Modern times demand modern methods; there are so many to be wounded that we just simply *must* use the spraygun technique. There is no more individual attention, true, but then that never really mattered. What you do with your wound is up to you. Find your own healer.

I, Cupid, have found mine and it truly pleases me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

office call

by . . . Charles E. Fritch

Odd characters come tapping at a psychiatrist's chamber door. But Dr. Rawlings just couldn't seem to unscramble the woman from Mars.

DR. RAWLINGS sighed a long sigh born of frustration and impatience and went wearily to the bookcase. Almost methodically he removed a large gold-titled volume of Freud's *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and withdrew the bottle from its hiding place. The bottle was half filled with an amber fluid which jiggled pleasantly as he held it in an unsteady hand, observing with a practiced eye how gaily it sparkled in the late afternoon sunlight. Then from the cavity he also extracted a small whiskey glass.

He took these tools to his desk, poured himself a stiff one, downed it, flopped into his swivel chair and closed his eyes. *Chicken farms,* he thought. He felt the fiery liquid seep through him, warming his insides with its silent flame, bringing a pleasant glow of satisfaction to his mind.

He closed his eyes tighter and regarded the darkened world with a calmness that was somehow conducive to rational thought even in this irrational world. To

Although Charles E. Fritch is a comparative newcomer to the science fiction fold he has the distinction of being so competent a craftsman that his veracity stands undisputed at every point. Who could doubt after reading this story the real existence of a Dr. Rawley, or deny a subconscious urge to at least date in a dream the charming Miss Austin?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought and to sleep, he realized suddenly, as he found his head tilting.

He rose quickly, blinking off the effects of the liquor, and carefully returned the utensils to their proper niche behind the volume of Freud on the bookshelf. *Good old Freud,* he thought, *always knew he'd come in handy one of these days.* Then he returned to his desk to consult a small pad, and silently cursed the cruel fates that had given him patients tumbling upon one another in a ridiculously mad haste to reach the jumbled sanity of the normal world.

Why couldn't there have been a decent interval of time between them, so he could take a shower, or have a game of golf, or maybe even hang on a small one, or see a psychiatrist himself. Or maybe start that chicken farm he'd been talking about for the past two years.

He jabbed a button, said into the intercom, "Miss Austin, will you please send in the file on Mr. Charles T. Moore?"—and without waiting for an answer snapped the machine off.

Fifteen seconds later the door opened and Miss Austin walked in, a Manila folder in one lovely hand. As usual she was in an immaculately white uniform. *White for purity?* he wondered. It was a tight-fitting garment that clung to every curve as though hanging on for dear life, and on second thought he mentally erased the purity inscription on his mind's slate.

Miss Austin had a beautiful walk, and beautiful legs to walk on. He stared at them as she approached the desk. He always stared at them, fascinated, and she always knew he did, and she smiled that enticingly mad smile of hers that always made him want to give vent to an emotional catharsis.

God, he thought, *how I'd love to psychoanalyze that woman! What a beautiful ego she must have. What a gorgeous i d.*

Carefully she deposited the folder on his desk, leaning forward strategically so her perfume could glide over him in intoxicating currents.

"Will that be all, Doctor Rawlings?" she asked in her honey-liquid tones.

"For now," he said, reaching for her hand and finding it. "But don't go away."

She smiled again, and gently freeing her hand, swept from the room. She looked even better from the back, if that were possible; after a few seconds deliberation he decided it wasn't possible. But it was women like Miss Austin that made him want a chicken farm, among other things. Miss Austin and a little tract of land far out in the country would be just perfect. In such a paradise he wouldn't even have to worry about the pecking order of hens.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In fact, he might even get engrossed in raising things other than chickens.

Sighing again, he studied the folder before him, which did not take very long. The patient was still quite young even though he had already made a mark of sorts on the world. A theoretical mathematician, apparently. Probably thought himself a square circle on an adding machine. The psychiatrist browsed through the folder's contents again, then jabbed the buzzer.

"You can send Mr. Moore in now," he said and snapped the intercom off before Miss Austin could answer. The present moment was no time to be distracted.

Dr. Rawlings held his head in his hands and stared morosely at the desk. Then he picked up a pencil and began tapping it against an inkwell. An incongruous thought surely, pencil and inkwell—what would Freud say about that?

He decided in the same thought that he didn't give a particular damn what Freud thought about inkwells. There were times in fact when he didn't care what Freud thought about anything. There were times when all we wanted to think about was a small chicken farm, with maybe a gorgeous honey-blonde like Miss Austin to help sow a few seeds.

He looked out the window at the sky and the tops of buidings, and recalled with bitterness the patient who had claimed that he could fly, and who had tried to jump to the street forty floors below solely to prove it. It would have made a nasty splash, he thought. *All the king's horses and all the king's men*— Unless, of course, the patient really *could* fly. . . .

He looked up, annoyed, and discovered that the door had not opened. Furiously, he jabbed the buzzer again. "Isn't Mr. Moore here yet?" he demanded, consulting his watch. "He was supposed to be here five minutes ago."

"He's here, Doctor," the receptionist's silk-and-satin tones came. "He's trying to get up enough courage to open the door."

"Oh," the psychiatrist said. He felt like adding something unprofessional, but he controlled himself. With an effort he shut off the intercom and just waited.

He looked up at the door and saw the knob turning slowly, ever so slowly. He watched its glistening facets turn in the dim natural lighting of the room, rotating as though in the slowest of slow motions.

He sighed and turned his attention to his desk top, where he discovered he had abstractedly pencilled on the blotter a four letter word not normally used in polite society. Hastily, annoyed with himself, he grabbed the pencil and used its erasing head to rub off the offending word.

When he looked up again, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

door had opened the slightest crack. *Damn,* he thought, *this job is going to drive me whacky yet.* He recalled an episode of a few weeks earlier. He didn't want to, but the thought came just the same. Some of his patients had delusions so logical and systematized it was hard to prove to them that they were wrong. Sometimes it was hard to prove to yourself they were not right after all.

The woman from Mars, for example. She had actually believed that she was from the fourth planet, was really a Martian stranded here unaccountably. She had told a good straight story, but he had managed to convince her that she was not from Mars. He had persuaded her that she was an Earthling like everybody else, and that space travel of any sort was utterly impossible anyway.

He had been about to prove that there was probably no such planet as Mars when she'd decided not to come back. That was close to the time the meteorite landed a few miles away, the one that had never been found. After all, while not a usual occurrence, overdeveloped lungs and six fingers on each hand didn't mean—

The door edged open slightly, and an eye peered fearfully into the room. Then it swung wide, and the young man standing in the doorway let out a blastfurnace sigh that could be heard in surrounding offices.

"Come in, Mr. Moore," the psychiatrist said, "come in, close the door, sit down."

Mr. Moore did all these things with normal speed and in the proper order, but he did have a tendency to sit on the edge of his chair, as though he were sitting on a cliff and might topple over at any moment. The psychiatrist doodled on his pad impatiently.

"Well now, just what seems to be the trouble?"

Mr. Moore wet his lips. His face was white. He said, "I'm a mathematician. I work at the University."

"Oh," the other said, bringing to voice facts he'd read a few minutes before. "You're *that* Charles T. Moore, the one whose picture was in the paper a short time ago. Something about mathematics, I remember."

Moore nodded.

"Einstein, wasn't it?" the psychiatrist mused. "Something I don't understand, Einstein."

"It's not easy," Moore agreed. "That's what started my difficulty."

"Oh?"

"Yes, when I learned that any point is the beginning or the end of the universe. Any point at all, the edge of this chair, the tip of my finger—behind any door."

"That's Einstein?"

He shook his head. "Partly. Mostly, it's Moore."

The psychiatrist seemed puzzled. "More what?"

"I mean it's *me,* my theory, my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

calculations. I've proved theoretically that any given spot can be a jumping off place for another universe. Do you realize what that means?"

The psychiatrist was annoyed by the question, for he had no idea what it meant. His one overwhelming, immediate desire was to start a chicken farm.

"Just what does it mean?" he compromised.

"It means that if we can develop this commercially, space travel to the farthest star will be as easy as walking across the street."

Dr. Rawlings' annoyance rose higher at this. Space travel again, after only a few weeks ago he had convinced a woman from Mars that such things were impossible. Oh, well.

"This is very interesting," he lied, "but—ah—just what is the nature of your difficulty?"

"My ideas used to be *only* theoretical," Moore told him. "But through some quirk of fate I've advanced beyond that stage to a point where I'm actually capable of crossing the barrier."

The psychiatrist nodded. "You mean you think you can actually do this?"

Moore shook his head emphatically. "I mean I *have* done it," he insisted. "Mind control."

"I see," the doctor said. On his pad he wrote 'hallucinations,' although he was jumping the gun slightly on that. Still, he felt sure of himself, and the pencil still had some eraser left on it. Under the word he drew a crude and rather vulgar picture of a rooster chasing a hen.

"That's why I came to you, Dr. Rawlings," Moore went on. "It's not that I'm neurotic or anything. It's just that I can't control this power, and I'd like to." He shuddered slightly. *"I'd better."*

"And you want me to help you," the psychiatrist said. "Which, of course, I'll be only too happy to do. But first, do you have any outward signs that you have—eh—crossed the barrier. That is, do you—well, see things, for example."

"Yes, I do," Moore said, remembering, and the psychiatrist pencilled two triumphant lines beneath the word 'hallucinations' on his deskpad. "It began about two weeks after I first made my mathematical discovery. I was lying awake in bed thinking of my theories and how, if ever they could be applied directly to the physical world, doors would be opened to any part of the universe. Just about then a knock came at the door."

The psychiatrist nodded. "What time was this?"

"About three in the morning," Moore said. "I got up, put on a robe and went to answer it, wondering who it could be at that time. I opened the door and there in the hall was a baby in a basket."

"A baby?" queried the psychia-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trist. "In a basket? Are you sure?"

Moore nodded. "And I noticed something else unusual. Out there it was Mars!"

"Out there? Out where?"

"Out in the hall. It wasn't the hall in my apartment building, it was some other hall, and through a window I could see a red desert and canals. There isn't a red desert where I live, or any desert at all. There are no canals either. It was Mars."

"I see," the psychiatrist said, and he drew a thick ellipse around the word on his pad. "Then what happened?"

"I was scared, but I couldn't leave a baby out there in the hall like that. So I picked it up, basket and all, and took it into my room and closed the door. And then—" He gulped and looked out the window at the sky and the tops of buildings. "Here's where the part comes in that's hard to believe."

"Yes? Go on," the psychiatrist prompted.

"The baby turned into a full-grown woman," Moore said.

Despite himself, the psychiatrist felt his eyebrows arch. Well, this was certainly a new one. "You say the baby turned into a full-grown woman. Er—ah—clothed?"

Moore reddened and stared at the floor. "No," he said. "I was scared. And embarrassed. Here I am a bachelor, and there was a nude woman in my apartment. How could I explain that to the landlady? Anyway, I threw open the door again, but this time the hall was different. It was like it was before—on Earth, I mean, instead of on Mars."

"Very interesting," the psychiatrist said, mentally picturing the situation and temporarily forgetting chicken farms. He wondered how Miss Austin would look *au naturel*. "Did you do anything? That is, anything—ah—well, anything at all?"

"I didn't know what to do," Moore said. "She looked about as surprised as I was, but not nearly as embarrassed. I closed the door again and tried to figure out what to do."

Despite himself, the psychiatrist was interested. "And did you?"

"I had to do something. She didn't know where she was, who she was, or how she'd gotten here. I told her that I thought she came from the planet Mars, and that there was evidently some sort of time stress in the field I'd constructed accidentally since she appeared to be only a child a few minutes before, and that it was my fault, and I'd try to help her.

"I tried to bring back Mars," he went on, "but I found I couldn't. In fact, I discovered that these things were evidently accidental, depending upon a frame of mind or something. Anyway, I slept on the couch that night, went out the next day and bought her some clothes at a store in town."

"Was she—er—constructed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like Earth women," the psychiatrist asked, at a sudden thought.

Moore blushed. "Yes," he said, "very definitely like Earth women. Except for one thing—she had six fingers on each hand."

The psychiatrist had been toying with the pencil. At that revelation he froze briefly. Then he tried to laugh it off mentally. No, it couldn't be.

"Weeks passed, and she didn't appear to be able to get adjusted," Moore said. "That's when I suggested she go to you."

Dr. Rawlings dropped the pencil completely. "The woman from Mars," he exclaimed. "*You* sent her here?"

Moore nodded soberly. "Yes, and I'd like to get her back. I'm in love with her."

"I haven't got her." He began to wish he did.

"I know. She was picked up in a rocket ship. Everyone else around here thinks it was a meteorite, but she told me before she left that they'd traced her by brainwaves or something, and would pick her up."

"And just what do you expect me to do?" the psychiatrist wanted to know. He picked up the pencil and made black lines over the 'h' in 'hallucinations.'

"I want you to help me discover what frame of mind must be cultivated to recreate Mars. I've got a hunch it's a subconscious problem. I've been accidentally creating all sorts of alien worlds behind doors when I least expect them. That's why I hesitated outside your office, to make certain when I opened the door the office would really be here.

"Why, only last week I opened a door to the men's rest room at the University and found myself staring down into the Great Nebula in Andromeda. If I'd stepped through . . ." He shuddered. "I don't know if going through would change me, but if I ever see Mars again—"

"Well, I think we can help you there," the psychiatrist told him. "Suppose you come around Wednesday, at two o'clock. That satisfactory?"

Moore rose, smiling. "Fine," he said. "And thanks a lot, doctor. You'll never know how much this means to me."

"Quite all right, quite all right. See you Wednesday."

Moore went to the door, opened it, went through to the outer office.

Well, thank goodness that was over. The psychiatrist breathed a sigh of relief. One of these days that chicken farm was going to be a reality. If this kept up . . .

He pressed a button on the intercom. "When's the next patient, Miss Austin?"

"Not until tomorrow, Dr. Rawlings," she cooed. "You have plenty of time for Mr. Moore yet."

"Plenty of time for— What are you talking about? He went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through that door about a minute ago."

The receptionist was silent for a minute, then she said, "He couldn't have. No one's come out of your office. I've been here all the time."

The psychiatrist flicked off the intercom. For a moment he stared out the window at the sky and the building tops. Then he went to the door, knelt, and saw a small amount of red sand, just a few grains that might have been kicked under the door by someone in a hurry.

He returned to Freud on the shelf, located the bottle and the glass, and poured himself a stiff one without waiting to transport the equipment to the desk. Then he went to the desk, and flipped on the intercom again.

"Miss Austin, do you like chicken farms?" he said.

"I love them, doctor," the honey voice answered. "But—"

"Never mind," he told her. "Just come in here. I've got a question to ask you."

He poured himself another drink.

Do you have every issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE? *Would you like a complete file on this magazine which features the most famous writers of science-fiction and fantasy? From the limited supply of copies left of the first three volumes we will fill orders while they last. Just fill in the coupon below. These early issues sold for 50c, and contained 192 fat pages. Some of the big names included are:*

Number 1—Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, Frank Belknap Long, Eric Frank Russell, A. Bertram Chandler, August Derleth, Fletcher Pratt and others.

Number 2—Clifford D. Simak, Evan Hunter, William Campbell Gault, Walt Sheldon, Richard Matheson, Irving E. Cox Jr., Poul Anderson and others.

Number 3—Philip K. Dick, William Morrison, William F. Temple, Evelyn E. Smith, C. M. Kornbluth, Wallace West, Dal Stivens, Curtis Casewit and others.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y.

I enclose $..... for ..... magazines.

Name .....

Address .....

City, Zone, State .....

Three copies for $1.25
Two copies for $1.00
One copy for 50c

Check issues wanted

Number 1 .....
Number 2 .....
Number 3 .....

FU 23

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my past is mine

by . . . Gerda Rhoads

Take one tiny memory out of a man's life—and the entire universe may turn topsy turvy.

THE VOICE ASKED at Eddie Tomlinson's elbow, "Is this seat free?"

Eddie nodded, and hardly looking around, picked up his hat which he had carelessly put on the seat at his side. A little impatiently he placed it on the rack overhead. Then he went back to his contemplation of the wooded hills through which the train was threading its way.

It was the first time he had been in the country since it happened and perhaps he had allowed himself, against his better judgment, some unconscious hope. Possibly because it was autumn, the very best part of autumn for being in the country. Certainly he *must* have allowed himself to hope, otherwise he would not again be feeling the sharp despair, which in recent months had subsided into a bleak and monotonous resignation.

"Dreary, isn't it?" said the voice of a stranger.

Eddie turned sharply towards the man who had taken the seat

Gerda Rhoads was born in Vienna and came to the United States with her parents by way of London and Rio. She was educated at Hunter College, became a ballet dancer, took up painting and has done some very charming canvases. Then she married a painter and they went to Paris and she turned to writing. Sounds glamorous, doesn't it? With the publication of this her first story Gerda Rhoads proves her pen is glamor-tipped too.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

next to him. Could it be? Could the same thing have happened to this man? In that case the psychiatrists would have been proved wrong and . . . well, nothing would be changed really. But perhaps it meant some ray of hope. At least he would not be so alone, he would be able to talk to this man. They could talk about it together. He almost blurted out the question right away. But he'd had so many unpleasant experiences with it that he'd refrained from asking it for a long time, and now the habit of silence held him back.

He looked at his neighbor more closely. The man's skin was freckled, he could tell that, and the hair rather light. There was something vaguely familiar about the eyes, about the whole face, but these days people tended to look rather alike . . . or anyway, more so than before.

The man looked at him attentively.

"Haven't we . . . no it couldn't be," he suddenly said. Then he added softly, so that Eddie could barely hear him, "It's become so hard to recognize old friends."

Eddie felt sure of it now. This man had sensed a kinship in him, and was in the same boat. But he was afraid to ask the question, so he was throwing out subtle hints, inviting *Eddie* to ask. Eddie took one more glance at the landscape, and then looked steadily at the man.

"I must ask you something," he said, forcing himself to speak slowly and calmly above the wave of excitement. Then he stopped, because he realized how the question would strike the stranger if he weren't what he seemed. "It's a strange question," Eddie continued haltingly.

"Go ahead," said the man encouragingly, his face earnest, "I won't think you crazy." The fear left Eddie.

"Do you, or did you ever, know color?" he asked.

"Color?" The man seemed disappointed, but not shocked.

"Yes, you know, red, green, blue, yellow and all the others . . ." Eddie's voice trailed off as his excitement faded. The stranger obviously didn't know, or there would have been an immediate response. All that showed on his face was disappointment faintly tinged with curiosity. At least, though, there was no ridicule.

"What was that word again?"

"Color."

"Co-lor . . . interesting. Would you tell me about it? Try to describe it."

"It can't be described," Eddie said, almost sharply. Then, relenting, he added, "I've tried before, many times, just after it happened."

"After *what* happened? I wish you'd tell me. I'd like to know for . . . for personal reasons, which I may tell you afterwards. Of course you may have related it so many times that it bores you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, as a matter of fact I haven't. I haven't told the whole story for months, and then only once." Eddie felt hope again. This man, though he didn't know color, obviously knew *something*. What he knew might help more than the unlikely theories of doctors and psychiatrists.

"It happened a little over six months ago on a rainy spring night," Eddie began. "I tell you all the details, about the rain and all, because who knows what counts and what doesn't?"

"Go on," said the man, "don't leave anything out."

"That night I felt lonely and sort of depressed, and I decided to go to the movies. Nothing much was playing in my neighborhood, so I went to look at the cheap revivals on Forty-second Street. I wandered around for a long time in the rain, getting more and more depressed.

"I couldn't find anything good playing, and I didn't feel like going home again, and just then I saw this garish poster of a bullfighter. Above it the movie marquee said, 'Blood and Sand.' I'd seen the movie before, and didn't think it was anything so special. But I remembered the color, real vivid and romantic. So I decided to go see it again. It was better than going back to the apartment."

"You said the word *color* again," the stranger interrupted, "you better try to explain that to me right now. Color, I mean."

"I can't," Eddie answered sadly. "If you've never seen it, I just can't. I told you I tried before. Anyway, that night there was still color, that is, up until the time I walked into that movie house. I came in in the middle of the film, during a scene which had impressed me a lot. The big bull ring with the golden-yellow sand, and the bullfighters wearing blue and green and gold and many other colors—the words are probably new to you—and the bright red cape. I tell you, I remembered that scene so clearly *because* of the colors, and now it was all black and white and grey.

"Those at least are words that you know: black and white and grey, and you know what 'tone' means. Well, color has tone too, but there is so much more, such great differences . . . It can't be described, but everything had it. Of course even in those days they made many movies in just black and white. But this particular one had been in color, as I said, and really fine color.

"When I came in then, as I said, in the middle of the bullfight scene and saw it was all just black and white, the red cape and the blue sky and all, I thought at first that I'd gone crazy, that my memory was playing terribly inventive tricks on me. Then came other scenes of which I'd remembered the color in great detail. I decided that I couldn't just have invented all that color so precisely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and believed that I'd really seen it. It occurred to me that maybe this was just a cheap black and white reprint of the original color film.

"Well, I stayed till the end of the film because, as I said, I didn't feel like going home that night, and I got pretty much used to the black and white, though the film was certainly much poorer that way.

"I stayed till the bull fight scene came around again, and when I first got out into the lobby I was too blinded by the sudden bright light to notice anything. It was out in the street that I got the shock. There was no color out there at all. The posters, the neon signs, people's clothes were just shades of grey, if they weren't black or white. I looked into a mirror on the side of a store window, and my own maroon tie was just a sort of darkish grey. It was as if everything, all life, had become a black and white movie.

"I was terribly frightened. I thought something had happened to my eyes, or to my brain. I ran back to the movie house, but the ticket booth was already closed. I asked a man who was just coming out, 'was that movie in color?' and he looked at me as if he thought me crazy, and walked on without answering. Of course it was a silly question, and what difference did it make if that movie was in color or not if I couldn't see color *anywhere?*

"So I walked towards the subway to go home. I told myself I was dreaming, or else I was overtired or something. It would have been quite a natural thing to happen to me if I had been overtired, because I'm a commercial artist, and used to be always working with color. Sort of an occupational disease maybe. I told myself that if after a good night's sleep I still didn't see color, I'd go to a doctor. That way I calmed myself a bit, and I slept like a log all night.

"Next morning I still didn't see any color, so I called up the agency and said I wouldn't be in that day because I was sick. Then I went to see a doctor. I just went to a man who had an office down the street, because I've never been sick since I got to New York, and hadn't any special doctor to go to. I had to wait a long time, and in the waiting room there was a copy of Holiday Magazine, a magazine that was always full of color pictures, and of course they were all black and white now. I got so worried glancing through it that I put it away, and closed my eyes till my name should be called.

"The doctor listened to my whole story, and then he said, 'What do you mean by color?' He pronounced it as you did—like a foreign word. I tried to explain it to him. That was the first time I'd tried to explain color, and I saw how impossible it was. Then I caught myself and thought how

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

obvious, this doctor is just trying to test me. Obviously he knows what color is, red and blue and all the rest, and here I'm trying to explain it to him, which is impossible. So I realized, or thought I realized, that the doctor was just trying to test me, to see if my mind was working logically. So I asked him for a dictionary.

"He gave me a Standard College Dictionary and I looked up color, to show him the definition, but it wasn't there. The dictionary jumped from coloquintida to Colosseum. So I looked for spectrum and for rainbow and for all kinds of synonyms, and for the names of some of the colors themselves, and none of it was listed. When I looked up from the frantic search the doctor had a strange expression on his face. 'I'm afraid I'm not equipped to help you,' he said, and wrote down the name and address of a psychiatrist for me.

"That's about all there is to the story, except that when I went home I looked through all my books, poetry and prose, which had been full of descriptions in terms of color. You know, red lips and blue sky and green trees and such, and it was all gone. No such words were in any of the books. I went to the library too, and looked in all kinds of books. And for a while I went around asking people the question I asked you earlier. I tried a few times more to describe color, before I gave up. I soon gave up asking people, because they thought me crazy or drunk, and I didn't want to end up in some institution.

"I felt terrible of course, not only because life without color is so barren, but also because it was all so confusing. I felt so alone. I walked around in a daze for a long time, not knowing any more what was true and what wasn't and still hoping it was all a dream. But I dreamed at night, and I dreamed in color, and then woke up to the colorless world. After a while the color went out of my dreams too.

"I went to see the psychiatrist finally, not because I really expected any help or explanation from him, but just to be doing something. I told him the whole story. That was the last time I told it, and it was over five months ago. He made a diagnosis. He said that because of some insecurity in my emotional life, some happening in my childhood, no doubt, I had needed to construct a wholly individual world for myself. He said that kind of thing *does* happen, though usually not to such a complete and well-worked out extent, that it usually passes during adolescence. But my insecurity, or whatever it was, had apparently been very pronounced, and my imagination fertile. He said there was no need now to analyse the causes any further, since the syndrome had vanished by itself, and I was apparently cured.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Since then I haven't told anyone, and till today I haven't asked the question. I've got pretty used to the grey world, and I work in black and white and tone. But inside of me I can't believe the psychiatrist, and I guess I don't want to. I guess I keep hoping all the time, and I was very sad just now, looking at the autumn trees."

Eddie sat in silence for a while, until he realized with embarrassment that he had been fixedly staring at the man next to him.

"What do you make of it?" he asked as lightly and casually as he could.

"Well," said the stranger, slowly and carefully, "except for the details and the exact circumstances it is very much like my story . . . No, no, with me it wasn't color, though there is a word, or rather there was a word, for that which was. The word is 'povodil' and I can't describe or explain it any better than you can color. But it was as much part of my world as your color. More so, in fact, because it wasn't just visual, but was perceptible to all the senses and was also part of reasoning.

"It stopped more than two years ago, and like with your color, the world became as though it had never existed. I had an extremely hard time adjusting. It was like coming to another planet, learning a new language . . . Well I just can't describe it, if you don't know povodil. You can see now why I wanted to hear your story. There was another reason too . . . You see people look so different now. But I have learned to a certain extent how to recognize the people I knew before povodil went, and I feel pretty sure I knew you once. Did you ever go to the University of Virginia?"

"Yes," Eddie said surprised, "I did. Class of '34." He looked again at the stranger, remembering the first impression he had had of having known the fellow. He had a rather average Irish type face, with a short nose and a generous mouth, and crow's feet at the corners of his eyes. He had freckles too, and his hair, being rather light, might be red. He searched his memory for a redhead he had known at the University.

"It seems very improbable," the man was saying now, interrupting his attempts to remember, "it doesn't seem possible that you could be he. But back at the University there was a fellow I remember very well. He was a graduate student, and he was doing very interesting research on the *pronding of povodil.* There was a great deal of talk about it when his thesis came out. I was just a junior then but I remember it. I remember him, and you look like him. Of course you look different, but you look as he would look without povodil and twenty years older. His name was, let's see what was his name? . . . Eddie Tomlinson. That was it."

Eddie started when he heard his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

name. He hadn't been listening to what the fellow was saying, he had been too busy trying to place him.

"Eddie Tomlinson! Why that's *my* name!" he cried now, in surprise. "How did you know it?"

"I just told you."

"Oh, yes, yes," Eddie said quickly, not wanting to admit that he hadn't heard. A face, a situation, a name were coming to the surface of his mind.

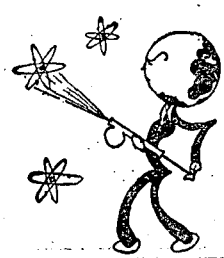
"Jerry Conlan," he exclaimed suddenly. "You must be Jerry Conlan!"

"Yes," said the man absently, "yes, that's my name. How very strange," he continued softly, "that you should be Eddie Tomlinson, one of the most promising young povodilomans of the time . . . and you've never heard of povodil or of prondation or deg or any of it."

He went on mumbling to himself while Eddie remembered that day when, after an art class, he had gone to watch the light rehearsal of the Drama Club's newest production and had been so impressed by the ingenious use of colored light that he had sought out the student who had designed them. He had talked for quite a while to the fellow, who had been a redhead named Jerry Conlan.

"So you're Jerry Conlan," Eddie interrupted his neighbor. "And what do you do these days? Still stage design and lighting? Or is it something else?"

"Stage design?" asked Conlan, "lighting? What's that?"



With the appearance of this issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *you'll have discovered for yourself a surprise we've been hugely wishing we could share with you. Yes, verily—we are NOW a monthly. And that means you'll be getting us every month. Spearheading the exciting new stories in our next issue is an Algis Budrys novelet which tells the story of a terrifying cosmic war with a brand of magic a little hard to classify. It's called* SHADOW ON THE STARS. *And Ted Cogswell makes his first appearance with a side-splitting humorous fantasy yarn,* MR. HOSKIN'S BLASTING ROD. *And short stories by Henry Hasse, Robert F. Young, etc. See you in 30 days!*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Have You Met THE saint

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE'S *Companion in Crime*

• • • *Certainly* there's no more widely known and beloved character in present day mystery fiction than Simon Templar, alias The Saint.

• • • *And certainly* there's no man alive more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a mystery magazine than the haloed buccaneer's famed creator—Leslie Charteris.

• • • *For most* of his adult life he has been a fantastically successful spinner of mystery stories. And he has been a student of crime fiction ever since he learned how to read.

• • • *As supervising editor* Leslie Charteris has seen to it that THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE has lived up to its proud slogan: "Some Old, Some New—the Finest in Mystery Fiction."

• • • THE SAINT is now a monthly. And every issue is replete with the best in crime fiction. Those of you, and it should be all of you, who like to vary your science fiction diet with a bit of deduction and mystery would do well to pick up a copy of our big brother, THE SAINT.

• • • *Here are a few* of the world famous authors who have graced its pages to date:

WILLIAM FAULKNER	DAMON RUNYON	OCTAVUS ROY COHEN
IRVIN S. COBB	E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM	LESLIE FORD
DOROTHY L. SAYERS	BEN HECHT	SIR HUGH WALPOLE
EDGAR WALLACE	MIGNON G. EBERHART	P. G. WODEHOUSE
CORNELL WOOLRICH	AGATHA CHRISTIE	PHILIP WYLIE
SAX ROHMER	G. K. CHESTERTON	BRETT HALLIDAY
WILLIAM IRISH	MACKINLAY KANTOR	MICHAEL ARLEN

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, New York

Kindly enter my subscription to THE SAINT DETECTIVE starting with ..... issue. Remittance herewith.

☐ 6 issues at $2.00 ☐ 12 issues at $3.75

Name.....

Address.....

City, Zone, State.....

PLEASE PRINT FU 23

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strangers to straba

by . . . Carl Jacobi

Can a ship hate—and have a strange hideous life of its own?

THEY SAT IN Cap Barlow's house on the lonely planet, Straba. It was early evening and Straba's twin moons were slowly rising from behind the magenta hills. Outside the window lay Cap's golf course, a study in toadstool cubism, while opposite the flag of the eighteenth hole squatted the kid's ship.

The kid had landed there an hour ago. He had introduced himself as Clarence Raine, field man for Tri-Planet Pharmaceutical, and had announced urbanely he had come to make a botanical survey. All of which mildly amused Cap Barlow.

The kid was amused too. From the *Pilot Book* he had learned that Cap was the sole inhabitant of Straba, and he regarded him —and rightly so—as just another hermit nut who preferred the spacial frontiers to the regular walks of civilization.

The old man packed and lit a meerschaum pipe.

"Yes sir," he said, "efficiency . . . regulation . . . order . . . that's

Like Robert Bloch, Margaret St. Clair, Frank Belknap Long and the late great Howard P. Lovecraft, Carl Jacobi won his first bright laurels as a story teller in the "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir." He was one of that early group of supernatural horror story writers who have since turned to science fiction, and achieved in the newer medium a fame quite as illustrious and quite as enduring. We know you'll like this somberly exciting yarn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what's spoiling all life these days. Those addle-headed scientists aren't satisfied unless they can dovetail everything."

Raine smiled and in the pause that followed cast his eyes about the room. It was circular and no attempt had been made to conceal its origin: the bridge-house of some discarded space-going tug. Along the continuous wall ran a triple tier of bookshelves, but it seemed that most of the books lay scattered on the table, chairs, and floor.

Above the shelves the wall was decorated with several three-dimensional water colors, pin-up girls in various stages of undress and mounted trophies of the rather hideous game Straba provided.

"About this survey," the kid began.

"Only last month," Cap Barlow continued, unmindful of the interruption, "a salesman stopped off here and wanted to sell me a gadget for my golf course. Said it would increase the gravitation over the fairways and prevent the ball from traveling any farther than it does on Earth."

He spat disgustedly. "You'd think any fool would realize it's an ideal course that can offer a Par three on a thousand yard hole."

But Raine hadn't come this far to listen to the dissertations of an old man. He was tired from long hours of sitting at the console of his ship. He stood up wearily.

"If you'll show me where I can stow my gear," he said, "I think I'll turn in and get some sleep. I've got a lot to do tomorrow."

For a week the kid didn't bother Cap at all. Each morning he went out with a reference book, a haversack and a canteen, and he didn't show up again until dark. Cap didn't mention that Straba had been officially surveyed ten years before or that results of this survey had been practically negative as far as adding to the *Interplanetary Pharmacopoeia* went. If Tri-Planet wanted to train its green personnel by sending them on a wild goose chase, that was all right with Cap.

But the old man had one thing that interested young Raine: his telescope mounted in a domed observatory on the top floor. Every night, Raine spent hours staring through that scope, sighting stars, marking them on the charts. Cap tried to tell him that those charts were as perfect as human intellect could make them. Raine had an answer for that too.

"Those charts are three years old," he said. "In three years a whole universe could be created or destroyed. Take a look at this star on Graph 5. I've been watching it, and the way it's acting convinces me there's another star, probably a Wanderer, approaching it from here." He indicated a spot on the chart.

He was efficient and persistent. He watched his star, checked and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rechecked his calculation, and in the end, to Cap's amazement sighted the Wanderer almost exactly where he said it would be.

That discovery only excited him more and after that he spent an even greater amount of time in the observatory. Then late one night he came to the top of the stairs and called for Cap.

Cap went up to the scope, and at first he didn't see anything. Then he did see it: a darker shadow against the interrupted starlight.

"It's a ship," the old man said.

Raine nodded. "My guess too. But what's it doing out of regular space lanes?"

"You forget you landed here yourself. Straba does occasionally attract a visitor. Her crew may need water or food."

Raine shook his head. "I hedge-hopped in from asteroid, Torela. This fellow seems to be coming from deep space."

They continued to watch that approaching shadow, taking turns at looking through the scope. It seemed to take a long time coming; but finally there was a roar and a rush of air and a black shape hurtled out of the eastern sky. The two men ran outside where Cap began to curse volubly. The ship's anti-gravs were only partially on. It had hit hard, digging up three hundred yards of the sixteenth fairway and completely ruined two greens.

Then the dust cleared and the two men stared. The ship was a derelict, a piece of space flotsam. There was no question about that. It was also a Cyblla-style coach, one of the first Earth-made passenger freighters to utilize a power-pile drive, designed when streamlining was thought to mean following the shape of a cigar. On her bow was a name but meteorite shrapnel had partially obliterated the letters.

"Jingoes," said Raine, "I never saw a ship like this before. She must be old—really old!"

The hatches were badly fused and oxidized, and it was evident that without a blaster it would be impossible to get in. Cap shrugged.

"Let her stay there," he said. "I can make a dog-leg out of the fifteenth, and keep the course fairly playable. And if I get tired of seeing that big hulk out of my dining room window I can always plant some python vines around the nearside of her."

Raine shook his head quickly. "There's no telling what we may find inside. We've got to find an opening."

He went over the ship like a squirrel looking for a nut. Back under her stern quarter, just abaft her implosion plates, he found a small refuse scuttle which seemed movable. He took drills and went to work on it.

Three hours later the two men were inside. There was nothing unusual about the crew quarters or the adjoining storage space.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But when they reached the control cabin they stood and gaped.

It was like entering a museum. The bulkheads were covered with queer glass dials, and several panels of manual operating switches. The power pile conduits were shielded with lead—lead mind you—and the lighting was apparently done with some kind of fluorescent tubes bracketed to the ceiling. It brought Cap back to the time he was a kid and his grandfather told him stories and legends of the past.

Just above the pilot's old-fashioned cosmoscope was a fancy metal plate with the ship's name stamped on it. *Perseus!*

"Do you know what ship this is?" demanded Cap, excitedly.

"I can read," said Raine.

"But do you know its history . the story behind it?"

Raine shook his head without interest.

Cap Barlow was still staring at the nameplate. "*Perseus*!" he repeated slowly. "It goes back to the First Triad Empire when the planets of Earth, Venus and Mars were grouped into an Oligarchy, when Venus was still a frontier. Life there was pretty much a gamble in those days, and the Oligarchs enforced strict laws of eugenics. They set up Marriage Boards and all young men and women had to undergo physical and mental examinations. Couples were paired off only after scientific scrutiny. In other words it was a cold-blooded system which had no regard for what we call love."

The old man paused. "Did you ever hear of Mason Stewart?" he asked suddenly.

Raine shook his head.

"As an individual he's pretty well forgotten today," Cap said. "I suppose you might call him a promoter. At any rate he figured a way to make himself a few thousand extra credits. He got hold of two condemned passenger freighters and with a flair for classical mythology named them *Perseus* and *Andromeda.*"

Raine, listening, lit a cigarette and blew a shaft of smoke ceilingward.

"The *Perseus* was moored in North Venus," continued Cap. The *Andromeda,* in the South. Stewart managed to spread the word that these two ships would be heading for Alpha Centauri to start a new colony. He also let it be known that the passenger lists would be composed of couples who were in love with each other without scientific screening or examination."

"Well, what happened?" demanded Raine with an air of acute boredom.

Cap bit off a piece of plug tobacco. "The rumor spread, and berths on the two ships sold for fabulous prices. Of course, the Constabulary investigated, but that's where Stewart was clever. The couples were to be split up:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all females in one ship, all men in the other. The Constabulary warned them that it would take years to cross such an immense distance—those were the days before the Wellington overdrive, of course.

"But the couples wouldn't listen, and the two ships took off. People of three worlds made a big fuss over them. The theme invaded the teletheater and the popular tape novels of the day. Newscasters went wild in their extravagant reports.

"And then the truth came out. Stewart got drunk and let slip the fact that the boosters on the two ships were absolutely worthless and capable of operating for only a short time. By then the ships were several hundred thousand miles beyond the System and out of radio range. Rescue ships were sent out but found nothing though they went as far as they dared. Stewart was jailed and executed. That's the story of the *Perseus*."

Raine nodded and ground his cigarette stub against a bulkhead. "Let's get on with the examination," he said.

They continued down the dark corridors, Raine leading the way with a magno search lamp. Some of the cabins were in a perfect state of preservation. Others were mere cubicles of rust and oxidation. Once Cap touched a chair which apparently had been made of wood or some similar product; it dissolved into dust on the instant.

This was the *Perseus*, the ship which had carried the male passengers of that strange and ancient argosy, but as yet they had come upon no skeletons or human remains. What then had happened to them?

Five minutes later they entered the captain's cabin and found the answer. On the metal desk, preserved in litnite, lay the rough log. Cap picked it up, opened it carefully and began to read:

January 21—All hands and passengers in good health, but God help us, booster reading: zero-zero. By radio we have learned that our sister ship, the Andromeda, is also without auxiliary power and adrift. Such a dual catastrophe would certainly argue for something other than coincidence.

Our charts show an asteroid of sizeable proportions to lie approximately midway between the two ships. Under ordinary circumstances I would order the lifeboats run out at once and attempt to reach this planetoid, hoping that by some miracle it will be capable of supporting life. But the circumstances are far from ordinary.

We sighted them at 4:30 P.M., *Earth-time, a few moments after the booster went dead and the ship lost steerageway. Absorbers! They hover out there in space, clearly visible through the ports,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

waiting for us to open the air-lock. There are two of them, but even as I write, one has turned and with unfailing accuracy has headed in the direction of the Andromeda.

Absorbers! What a world of myth and legend surrounds them. Are they organic or inorganic? I do not know. I only know they have been mortally feared by sailors since the first rocket blasted through Earths' orbit. They are what their name implies: devourers of life, with the peculiar, apparently meaningless power of transforming themselves into a physical facsimile of their victims.

One of them is out there now, swirling lazily like a miasmic cloud of saffron dust . . .

Cap handed the book to Raine who read it and handed it back without comment. And at that moment Cap saw the kid in his true light: a cold-blooded extrovert who was interested in the ship only for what he could get out of her.

Next day, without asking permission, Raine began the task of dismantling the *Perseus*. He knew he had a potential fortune at his fingertips, for every portable object he could transport back to Earth or Venus would bring a high price from curio-hungry antique hunters.

For a week he worked almost unceasingly at the salvage operation. He unscrewed the ship's nameplate and made a little plush box for it. He took down the dials of the cosmoscope, the astrolog and other smaller instruments and made them ready for shipment. He stripped out the entire intercom mechanism, the old fashioned lighting fixtures, to say nothing of the furniture and personal effects which hadn't spoiled by time.

It was on a Sunday evening that matters came to a head. In the early dusk Straba's twin moons were well above the horizon, shining with a pale light. Cap was in the kitchen brewing himself a cup of coffee when through the window he saw Raine emerge from the *Perseus* and carry an armful of equipment across to the little lean-to shed where he stored the salvage. He came out of the shed and something prompted him to look forward. An instant later he ran to the house and took the steps three at a time to the observatory.

He was up there a quarter of an hour before he came down again, a queer look on his face.

"Mr. Barlow," he said, "what's that thing that looks like a gun emplacement on the flat on the other side of the house?"

"That's exactly what it is," Cap told him. "A Dofield atomic defender. I've had that gun here a long time. When I first set up housekeeping on Straba, this part of the System was pretty wild. Pirates weren't unusual."

"What's its range?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, I don't know exactly. But it has a double trajectory that makes it a pretty potent weapon."

Raine looked at the old man for a long moment. "You probably don't believe in coincidences," he said. "But come upstairs. I want to show you something."

Cap followed him up to the observatory and looked through the scope. At first he couldn't believe his eyes. If he had been alone he would have said he was dreaming.

But there it was, a miniature satellite caught helplessly in the planet's polar attraction, midway between Straba's twin moons. He was looking at another antiquated space vessel; a ship that almost detail for detail was a replica of the *Perseus*. The truth dawned on him gradually.

It was the Andromeda—the sister ship of the Perseus!

The kid didn't hurry himself, bringing in the *Andromeda*. For two nights he did nothing but watch the sister ship through the scope. Then he carefully removed the preservative covering from the Dofield defender, cleaned and oiled the barrel and made the gun ready for a charge.

"If I can put a shot abaft her midsection," he said, "it might spin her out of polar draw long enough to fall into Straba's linear attraction . . ."

"Why don't you take your ship up and tow her in?" Cap said.

Raine shook his head. "Too dangerous. I'd have to come to a dead stop to fasten my grappler and at that range I'd likely become a satellite myself."

Meantime the *Perseus* lay neglected save for the tour of inspection Cap took through her on Friday morning. Cap hadn't been in the ship since Raine had started his salvage operations, and the old man was curious to see how work had progressed.

He entered through the refuse scuttle and proceeded to the control room. The bulkheads were bare expanses with only a few nests of torn wires and broken conduits to show where the dials and gauges had been ripped from their mounting places. The place looked desecrated and defiled.

Cap left the control room and mounted to the pilot's cuddy. Here, too, Raine's work was in evidence. The old man stood there, looking at the dismantled chart screens and thinking about the ship's strange and tragic past.

Her life boats were gone and the inner door of the airlock was still open. Her passengers and crew must have attempted escape in the end. Had they managed to slip by the Absorber and reached the asteroid, the name or chart number of which the captain had neglected to mention in the log? And were there such things as Absorbers or had the captain under stress of the situation given in to his emotions and flights of fancy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cap had heard the usual sailors' stories, of course. How a freighter had come upon one of them off Saturn's rim and sent out a gig to investigate. How the gig and all men in it had simply dissolved and become a part of the writhing cloud of mist. And how that cloud had then slowly coalesced into the shape of the six men and the gig.

As he stood there, Cap abruptly became aware of a vague pulsation, a rhythmic thudding from far off. He put his ear to the wall. The sound lost some of its vagueness but was still undeterminable as to source.

He went down the port ladder to the 'tween deck. Here the sound faded into nothingness, only to return as he descended the catwalk to the engine room. But in that cavern-like chamber he became conscious of something else.

He had a feeling he was surrounded by life as if he stood within the body of a living intelligence whose material form included the ship itself.

Clearly audible now was that distant thud . . . thud . . . thud . . . like the beating of a great heart.

Saturday Raine announced he was ready to "shoot down" the *Andromeda*. Unfortunately Cap figured he wouldn't be there to see the show. He had had a signal from one of his weather-robots on the dark side of the planet that morning, reporting that a cold front was moving down and the migration of the Artoks was about to begin. The Artoks could be mighty troublesome when they came en masse. If Cap didn't want his golf course eaten to the roots he'd have to stop them before they started. The generators which powered the barrier wires across the Pass would have to be turned on and the relay stations set in order.

It was late before he made his return. Dusk had set in and the Straba's twin moons were riding high when he reached the hill overlooking the house. On the flat below him he could see the moonlight glint on the barrel of the Dofield defender, and he could see Clarence Raine standing by the gun as he made preparations to fire.

For a moment Cap stood there, drinking in the scene: his golf course spread out in the blue light like a big carpet and in the center of it the black cigar-shaped *Perseus*. There was something virile about that antiquated ship, something different from the *Andromeda* he had seen through scope. It was as if the *Pereus* were all masculine, while the *Andromeda* were its daintier feminine counterpart.

And then Raine touched the trigger. There was an ellipse of yellow flame, a mushroom of white smoke and a dull roar. Cap was flung backward by the shockwave. The hills fielded the explosion, flung it back, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thunder went grumbling over the countryside.

In the empty silence that followed, Cap's wrist watch ticked off the passing minutes. The moonlight returned from behind a passing cloud, to reveal Raine by the Dofield defender, binoculars to his eyes. Time snailed by. The night was passing.

And then the roar came again, this time from above. Cap saw a great cylindrical shadow slanting down from the sky. The *Andromeda* struck far out on the flat beyond the house. It struck with a crash of grinding metal and crumbling girders.

For an instant after that a hush fell over everything. And then from the *Perseus* in the golf course came a sound, low at first, growing louder and louder. To Cap it sounded like a moan of anguish, of hatred and despair that seemed to issue from a hundred throats.

The *Perseus* trembled, began to move.

Cap stared. The ship moved on its belly across the fairway. Like a timeless juggernaut it entered the flat and slid out across the tableland toward the crumpled wreckage of its sister vessel.

Raine twisted about as he heard the thunder of that advancing hulk. Fear and disbelief contorted his face. He uttered a cry, leaped from the mount of the Dofield and began to run wildly across the flat. For an instant Cap thought he was going to reach the first low hillock that led to higher ground and safety. But Cap had reckoned without the terrific drive of that vessel.

Was it the Absorber—that strange creature of outer space—which had transposed its own inexplicable life into the shell of the dismantled *Perseus* and now *was* that ship *alive* with all the ship's hates, joys and sorrows? Organic into inorganic—a transmutation of a supernormal life into a materialistic structure of metal . . . cosmic metempsychosis too tremendous for the finite mind to grasp.

The *Perseus* came on, bowling across the flat like a monster of metal gone mad, grinding over rock outcrop and gravel, throwing up a thick cloud of dust. It came on with a terrible fixation of purpose, with a relentless compulsion that knew no halting. It met and engulfed the helpless figure of Clarence Raine and a cry of mingled hate and triumph seemed to rise up from its metal body.

The *Perseus* continued along the moonlit plateau, heading straight for the wreckage of the *Andromeda*. Not until it had reached that formless mass did it stop. Then it shuddered to a standstill and ever so gently touched its prow to the prow of the sister ship.

For a long moment Cap stood there motionless. Then, head down, he slowly made his way down the hill toward his house.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

true to type

by . . . Arthur T. Harris

A machine can be loyal—even to a rascal. But writer Pascal Halmer courted a monstrous retribution.

PASCAL HALMER had a superficial talent. And he was smart. You'd never find him rewriting a theme that had appeared, say five or ten years before, in a popular monthly. He was too smart for that. But Halmer would haunt the second-hand magazine stalls, and buy a pile of fiction publications published ten to twenty years ago. Then, back in his dingy furnished room, he'd uncork a bottle of cheap brandy, roll a smoke and settle back to read.

Presently he would chuckle, rip out the sheets he had read, and do some pencil work on them. Then he'd seat himself before me and begin typing the pilfered plot, twisting it about in such a fashion that plagiarism would be extremely difficult to prove.

He'd change the locale, the sequence of events, all the names, retaining only the plot gimmick, the essence of the story.

Now I am not trying to pose a moral issue. For under the deft fingers of Pascal Halmer, I had, for the first time in my life, the feeling of creativeness, of origin-

This story not only achieves a quite remarkable suspension of disbelief in the supernatural. It poses a fascinating problem. If you went to sleep over a typewriter and woke up with an idea as terrifying as this staring you in the face could you remain calm about it. Seemingly Arthur T. Harris could—and did. But then, he didn't have a typewriter like Pascal Halmer's.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ality of thought, aim and purpose.

Of course I too was a fraud. But, I told myself, nobody knew *our secret*. And we entertained just as many readers as the more creative writers in the business. All my life, I had been a hopeless drudge, used by bored typists in a little office where I was limited to legal papers, stencils for invoices and such.

Now I contributed to the pleasure of thousands of eager readers of escape fiction. Late in middle age I had found my niche in the creative world.

Thus it was that my personality began to undergo a change. I came to think of myself as a colleague of Pascal Halmer. And as his friend, his confidant, did I not acquire certain proprietary rights?

You can understand then, how shocked I became when Halmer first began to neglect me. Little things, but they hurt. An instance was the afternoon when he came home with a brand-new FM radio receiver.

Before long he became so absorbed in his recorded classics that he forgot to oil me, to change my ribbon, to put on my cover when he'd typed out "30" at the end of a story.

I sulked. My keys began to stick. My ribbon grew smudgy and faded. But Halmer paid me no heed until he received a humorous little note from an editor one day.

"Your yarns are tops," he read aloud, "but reading them has made me wear trifocals!"

With a muttered oath Halmer left our attic studio, returned with typewriter oil, a type brush, a new ribbon. *But he didn't do this for love of me!* He did it only to keep his editor happy. And that hurt.

Naturally my morale was affected. My keys began to rattle. My warning bell, to signal a line's end, became so inhibited that Halmer would curse when I failed to ring. And my platen began to crack.

The climax came one afternoon when I had been particularly difficult to handle. Halmer finally banged my keyboard with his fist, picked up the phone, and dialed a number. Stunned, I listened as he said:

"Acme Typewriter Service? This is Pascal Halmer, the writer. My old machine is on its last gasp. I need a new one. You have several new models on hand? Good! Send one over—"

The end—"30"—*fini!* My faded keys stared upward at Halmer. At all costs I must regain his confidence! He must see me, must understand that I was more than just an old beat-up machine!

And he did. My concentration gradually drew his eyes to me.

Sardonic, amused, cynical, Halmer gazed down at me, his gray eyes cold and calculating.

"You're the only one that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knows the story of my struggles," he said. "With you, my hard days go. I am now an established writer. My stories now get top rates. You always were too slow and stodgy, anyway. On a new machine I shall write better than ever!"

That's what you think, my fine-feathered friend, I thought, as my mood shifted violently from abject contrition to bitter anger. *That's what you think!*

Pascal Halmer had a plot to plagiarize that night. He ripped right along until three in the morning, producing five thousand neatly mortized words with my help for a men's magazine. He typed out "30" at the end of his stolen tale. But he couldn't think of a new title for the story.

So he left page one in my carriage, where he had re-inserted it, to write in the title. He yawned sleepily, muttered: "Hell with the title. I'll do it in the morning. Set the alarm clock for nine, deliver the script at ten—"

I waited until my feckless friend was drowned in gurgling snores. Then, taking a grip on my nerves, I steeled myself to perform an independent act such as I had never before dared to attempt.

Of my own volition I began to type . . .

The alarm clock went off at nine the next morning and Halmer came grudgingly, stiffly awake. His eyes were bloodshot; his reflexes were down. Presently he walked stiffly across the room, stopped in front of me and gazed at the title I'd written—"The Brave Die Hard"—not brilliant but a change from the title used originally on the story.

The author's name that I had typed below the title made no impression on Halmer at all. He had been so sleep-dazed the night before that I was gambling on his being vague about details.

"Of couse!" he muttered. "Fell asleep thinking I hadn't doped out a title! I guess I was too tired to register . . . But it's a pretty good title considering the state I was in . . ."

Hurriedly he gathered up the typescript, attached a clip, put the story in a manila envelope, and dashed off to see his editor.

Now I had but to wait . . .

A half hour before noon Halmer returned, his face haggard with fatigue, but his gray eyes alight with arrogance. After two stiff shots of brandy, he bent over me, waving before my type-eyes a publisher's check for two hundred and fifty dollars.

"See?" he sneered. "They raised my rate. At last I'm on my way! Tomorrow I'll trade you in on a new machine, move out of this crummy garret . . ."

He had another drink, then stretched out on his cot and was soon asleep.

I waited . . .

Late in the afternoon, as the sky grew gray and clouded, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phone rang. I tensed. Halmer woke up, fumbled for the desk-lamp switch, uncradled the phone.

"Yes?" he said sleepily, petulantly. "Oh, hello, Evans . . ." He sat erect, his voice becoming polite, ingratiating.

Evans was his editor to whom he'd given the story I'd typed last night.

"I don't quite follow you, old boy . . ." Halmer stammered.

Now Evans' angry voice was loud and I could hear it, too. "No? Well, I just wanted to tell you that 'The Brave Die Hard' is just as good today *as when it was first written forty years ago!*"

I thought Halmer would have a stroke. "But *how*—*why*—what makes you *suspect*—" now his voice was a shriek—"it's *not* the same story! It *couldn't* be! I wrote that story from scratch!"

"Then you didn't scratch hard enough," the phone sneered. "We found the original by checking through bound volumes in the public library. When the word gets around, you'll be skunk bait in the publishing business. And, incidentally, we've stopped payment on your check."

I almost felt sorry for the poor fool.

"But you can't *do* this to me!" Halmer screamed. "It's a miserable coincidence! I challenge you to prove—"

"If it's coincidence how come the other guy's name appears in the by-line?"

"His name? Instead of *mine?"* His voice was incredulous.

"Maybe you typed it subconsciously, Halmer, unless you've got an enemy in the house!"

The mocking voice hung up.

Like a sleepwalker, Halmer cradled the phone. He stared at the check, still propped up on the desk where he'd left it. Suddenly he lunged for it, tore it to bits, flung the pieces on the floor.

Then he threw himself on his bed, and beat his fists against the wall.

Wait till he gets over the first shock, I thought. *Wait till he begins to think . . .*

It wasn't long before Halmer sprang from his cot, lurched across the room and stopped in front of me.

"You!" he shouted. "You mechanical Judas! Only *you* could have crossed me up!"

With berserk strength he swept me up, stalked across the room again—and hurled me straight through the dormer window!

There was a sharded crackle as the glass shattered. There was a much louder crash when I hit the flagstones in the courtyard alley, collapsed into a mass of twisted junk . . .

Maybe I wasn't as smart as I thought!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two way destiny

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

They were alone on an enchanted planet, a lost Eden glowing with beauty and strangeness. But over them hung a cloud of tribal hate.

SHE WAS KNEELING when I saw her, her face half in shadows, her girlishly slender figure mirrored by the cool-running stream at her feet.

You'd think that on a planet like Dracona a man would be safe from shock. Between the fire mountains and the sea, and the snowy-crested birds that never stop singing you'd think that nothing could surprise him.

Remember Blake's City and Garden, his New Jerusalem with its shining Eden just over the hill? Well—Dracona is just as tremendous as that, even though it's all a garden wilderness with the city part left out.

Surely on Dracona there was enough nerve-tingling beauty everywhere to enchant a lad with my capacity for enjoyment. Why couldn't I have accepted that beauty as a near approach to paradise, content in the knowledge that I was my own master under the stars? Why did I have to step into a forest clearing and let a slender pale girl strip away all of

As science fiction has increased its speculative scope there has come into its orbit a new and largely unexplored world of shining possibilities—the world of comparative ethnology. Why do some primitive human societies glorify hate, fear, cruelty, war, and others live at peace with their neighbors? In this unusual novelette the gifted and versatile Frank Belknap Long has penetrated to the very core of the mystery with dramatically compelling logic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my defenses, leaving me as naked as a new-born babe to the great, roaring winds of unreason?

If I had shouted the question then and there the forest might have murmured in reply: "It's because you haven't seen a woman for so long. It's because loneliness is a destructive blight, and you're a young romantic fool."

It might have shouted that to my mind, to the tumultuously pounding blood at my temples. But it wouldn't have been a complete answer.

I knew she wasn't from Earth the instant she raised her eyes, and looked at me. Mocking eyes she had, of a deep, lustrous violet, and her pale hair clustered in little, golden ringlets about her brow, giving her the tantalizingly defiant aspect of a woman with enough of the eternal tease in her to be secretly amused by her own beauty.

She was collecting zoological specimens in the pollen-scented Draconian dusk. Not me, especially. Just iridescent spider bats, darter birds with vermilion beaks, and flying lizards which measured forty-eight inches straight across their wing-tips.

To be strictly accurate—there was only one lizard. It was thrashing wildly about in the metallic net at her back, the glow from the stationary lure-light giving it the aspect of some fiery monster which she had enticed from its cave by her beauty, and trapped at the risk of her life.

As I returned her stare she blinked in amazement, then laughed outright, the gulfs between us dissolving in a sudden, warming intimacy that was like nothing I'd ever known before.

To keep the scales from dipping too cruelly to her side I threw in everything I had that could be weighed and measured. Mother Earth still gives her sons a good start physically. Surely I was big and strong enough to please her, with a grip no man could break.

Furthermore, I knew how to look after myself. I'd been born and bred to the thunder of primitive rocket jets, and I could walk any jungle like a native, bargain and hold my own. I was a man who would fight tooth-and-nail to justify what I was and always would be at heart—an Earthborn trader.

We of Earth are traders still! We haven't forgotten how to rejoice when waterfalls crash on rocks white with foam, and the mists of morning rise clear and cold to the wheeling stars. I was prepared to tell her what that meant in terms of human dignity, human worth.

I was prepared to remind her that the real target of a trader is the unknown. Everything else he does, or fails to do, is a prelude to the kind of wayfaring that brought the restless human breed to Tragor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tragor! The scales started dipping her way, and I couldn't stop them. She was a woman of Tragor, with the star-bright insignia of her heritage gleaming on the folded-back flaps of her weather-jacket.

I thought of how human civilization had shifted from Earth to the stars, and what it meant to stand at the hub of the Galaxy in Tragor City. I thought of Tragor City as a man will who is eager not to remain a child in the eyes of one who has never known the meaning of childhood.

I thought of the thousand square miles of research laboratories, the museums and the libraries, the sports arenas swimming in a golden radiance and the sky-mirroring splendors of the biogenetic fulfillment centers. I thought of the schools where teaching had become an exact science completely integrated with human needs.

I remembered that no woman of Tragor could ever become tender and yielding without first dissecting a man. I told myself she'd see through me the instant I spoke to her. With her understanding of the conflict between the sexes the primitiveness in me would stand out like a gall blister on a sturdy oak.

Right at that moment I didn't feel so sturdy. But I knew I'd have to speak first. I couldn't just stand there staring her out of countenance.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," I said. "I didn't mean to stare, but I couldn't very well help myself. I don't quite know how to say it. You're not just an attractive woman. I wouldn't have stared if you were just one woman in ten —or one woman in twenty. I stared because I think you're the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

She flushed scarlet. "I thought you'd never stop staring," she said.

"You're angry," I said. "Don't be. Many men must have told you how beautiful you are. I just happen to mean it."

"Please," she whispered. "Are Terrans always that abrupt?"

"We have a reputation for candor," I said. "If I hadn't told you why you left me speechless you'd have been angry for the wrong reason. You may take that as a compliment."

"I'm not sure I want to."

"You must know how lovely you are," I protested. "Why should you resent being told the simple truth?"

"Perhaps this is one of my bad-tempered days," she said, her eyes searching my face. "You don't look like the kind of man who would deliberately try to embarrass anyone. No man is wise enough to be gallant by design, and make the pretense seem casual and completely honest. You're right, of course. I had no reason to be angry."

She came toward me, straight-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ening her hair, her eyes crinkling with undisguised amusement.

"I still don't know who you are?"

"The name's Hargon," I said. "Taro Hargon. I came here to trade with the natives. I get on fairly well with them."

Her eyebrows went up. "Natives? I haven't seen any."

"You will," I promised her.

You can accept almost any reality when it's thrust upon you, even the wonder of a woman of Tragor facing you in a wilderness Eden with a warmth so unmistakable it makes your senses reel.

Her name was Kallatah, and she had come to Dracona alone in a faster-than-light cruiser to collect zoological specimens for the natural history museum at Tagga. Just for the record, Dracona's the fourth planet of a second-magnitude sun in the Constellation Cygnus, and it's as far from Tragor City as it is from Earth. Tagga is a suburb of Tragor City—a white and beautiful metropolis in its own right.

"It's my first important assignment," she told me. "Naturally I've got to make good at it. You see, there's a new director of biological research on the Guiding Council, and from all reports he's the kind of man who is only impressed by results. When I have my first interview with him he'll forget I'm a woman. I'll have to shine as a scientist who doesn't make mistakes."

"You've made one already," I told her.

I walked past her, stared into the net. The captive lizard was twisted into a repulsive-looking knot, its verdigris-colored tail thrashing furiously back and forth. Draconian flying lizards are monstrous brutes. They're four feet in length and have a metallic green sheen to them, and when they have reason to hate their jaws can close with a ferocity unparalled in nature.

Visualize a Tyrant King dinosaur with ribbed, skeletal wings, reduced to the dimensions of a kangaroo, and you'll have a fairly accurate mental picture of one.

All they do is eat. Birds and small mammals, fruits, berries and nuts. In twenty-four hours a Draconian flying lizard can eat three times its weight in food. But a man is safe if he keeps his distance, for they are lazy by nature and don't attack without provocation.

"They're taboo animals," I told her. "The natives call them 'Servants of the Mountain.' If your purpose was to infuriate the natives you couldn't have made a better start."

She returned my stare with a strange mixture of alarm and defiance. "I had no way of knowing that!" she protested. "This planet is down on the charts as uninhabited. A virgin wilderness. If there are intelligent primitives here—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Her face grew suddenly strained. She stared about her as if seeking an answer for something intangible that was pressing in upon her thoughts and undermining her confidence in herself.

I was feeling it too. A kind of cold unpleasantness with underpinings of loneliness and dread. When you're thousands of light years from Earth you've got to hold tight to your anchorage in the past, your primal birthright of friendship and trust.

There were a thousand ties linking me to Earth, and that distant jungle world was just a stopping off point to me in a web of heart-warming memories that sustained me night and day. No matter how lonely I became I could always tell myself that I'd soon be going back to the people and places I'd known all my life. I was far away, sure. But there would always be friends awaiting my return.

Freeze that memory chain, shatter the brittle links, and the human mind has no refuge left anywhere in time or space. I had only to substitute Tragor for Earth to know how Kallatah must have felt. But before I could move to her side all of the links snapped, and we were caught up in a jungle new and terrible and strange, with all points of reference stripped away.

I'd experienced that horror before and I knew exactly what to expect.

It began with a dull flickering, a faint shifting of light and shadow at the edge of the clearing. Leaves swirled up from the forest floor, and a solid wall of vegetation began to sway, to tremble and twist about. As Kallatah cried out in alarm a tangled mass of bright, toadstool-like growths split up into dozens of spinning fragments, the air about them crackling and bursting into flame.

With a sudden, roaring sound a tree collapsed, dislodging a screaming shrewlike beast that scampered into the clearing with its tail between its legs. There was a moment of awful silence while the jungle built up tensions past all sanity. The clearing became a trap brimming with a malevolence as unnerving as the ticking of some hidden detonating device.

A black blur of panic rose to encompass me as a concentration of hatred almost palpable plucked agonizingly at my mind. I was following the motion of the foliage with sick horror when out of the jungle came another beast, web-footed, walking upright.

In utter silence it stumbled to and fro, its froglike body glistening with swamp water, its stalked eyes luminous with fright. It advanced and retreated, bent double, and went into a kind of frantic waltz.

What happened then was as unexpected as it was terrifying. The light grew dazzling again, as if a cloak of fire had descended

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the clearing. With a harsh screeching the frog leapt high into the air and was slammed back against a tree by a force that ploughed a furrow in the ground clear across the clearing.

I watched it sink to the ground with a broken back, shaken both by the violence which had been done to it, and an unnerving glimpse of Kallatah's white face staring at me from the shadows. So terrible was the wrath unleashed that it had taken on a blind purposelessness. I knew that everything in the clearing was marked for destruction unless—

I crossed to where Kallatah was standing, and gripped her by the shoulders.

I spoke urgently, almost harshly. "The natives are watching us!" I warned. "When they saw you capture that lizard their anger got out of hand. Do you understand? They're trying to kill us with their minds."

"What can it mean?"

She swayed against me and I caught the faint fragrance of her hair. She was trembling so I wondered if she had really heard me, or if the fear in her voice was no more than an echo of the dread she must have felt on seeing the frog-creature go hurtling through the air.

I started shaking her, forcing her to look at me. "They're poltergeists," I told her. "They can set fires and move objects from a distance. The power resides in an area of the brain which civilization seems to blunt. It's an ESP faculty which was part of man's original survival equipment. Our cavemen ancestors could reach out with their minds in that way too."

She still seemed not to hear me. In desperation I raised my voice, continuing to shake her. "They get to our minds first—in a horrible, primitive sort of way. They strip our minds bare so that we'll feel isolated—lost. Primitive man could kill off his enemies in the same way—by paralyzing them with a mental projection of the jungle as a kind of trap. Paralyzing them with fright, then closing the jaws of the trap."

"I don't believe it!" she almost sobbed.

"You'll be convinced if you don't do as I say!" I warned.

She drew back from me, as if firmly determined not to be convinced.

"You find out these things by studying primitives in different stages of development," I went on urgently. "Don't forget—I'm an Earthborn trader. You of Tragor may scoff, but I've studied dozens of primitive humanoid groups. I know that they can be won over if you handle them just right."

"What's just right?"

"Play along with me," I urged. "Follow my cue."

"Play along—"

"An old Earth expression.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We've got to play up to them, put on an act."

Before she could protest or cry out I swept her into my arms. I ran my hands through her hair, raised her chin, and kissed her—very firmly and determinedly for an instant.

"This is part of the act," I whispered.

Being a woman of Tragor, she could hardly have believed that my impulsiveness had been prompted solely by a desperate human need for companionship in a moment of shared danger. She must have known it went deeper than that, and she would have been right. A giddiness swept me like a gusty hurricane wind on a tidal estuary bright with a thousand pulsating tropical blooms.

I released her suddenly, and she leapt back, her eyes startled and accusing. "You're either a madman or a sick child!" she whispered.

"We'll talk about it later," I said. "Now is not the time."

"I feel sorry for you."

"Later."

The clearing quieted down, and there was silence for a moment. Then out of the forest they came, walking three abreast. Geipgos, the old tribal chieftain, and his son Slagoon, and the warriors with their rippling muscles glinting in the pollen-scented dusk, and their spears held high in a cautious withholding of wrath.

You couldn't call it a greeting. They were still shaken with anger, still ready to kill.

I went forward to meet them, with Kallatah in the crook of my arm. I'd talked and bargained and haggled with them a dozen times, but now I was seeing them for the first time through her eyes.

I have a curious gift of empathy. I could share her awe and admiration, and the stunned incredulity which must have made her doubt the evidence of her eyes.

The natives of Dracona are physically comely and well-proportioned, and they carry themselves with such an air of easy grace that you have to look twice to realize that they are not entirely like ourselves.

They have three eyes, but the extra one is so smoothly lidded that when it remains shut you scarcely notice it. Their three extra, slightly attenuated arms are not obtrusive, for they carry them pressed closely to their sides. And the green sheen of their skins looks more bronze than green in the forest gloom, and is hence far less startling than might be supposed.

They had such keen, discerning eyes, and mobile features that when they smiled in friendly greeting it was hard to think of them as primitives at all.

They were not smiling now.

I tightened my hold on Kallatah's wrist, and looked Geipgos straight in the eye—the big forehead eye which opened slowly to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glow with fierce reproach and scorn.

"Mukith Mani-Bumini!" I said. That translated out as: "I would know the reason for your displeasure, old friend!"

It was an excellent beginning and it brought an instant, completely understandable reply. The fire mountain had been complaining all day. Now the reason was clear to all. One like myself, only a female, had taken captive a Servant of the Mountain. Her punishment and death must follow as a matter of course.

Geipgos' three eyes watched me, as if seeking in the frailties we had in common some excuse for my defense of such a female monster.

"Tun Huhji Swan," I said. "This woman is more dear to me than life itself."

I waited for his astonishment to subside, then went on quickly. "She is my mate. She is the adored one of my heart. The Servant of the Mountain flew to join us when he saw how deliriously happy we were. He wished to give us his blessing."

It was a good beginning only if I could convince Geipgos that the lizard had flown into the net of its own free will, and had its own peculiar reason for not wanting to leave.

"The Servant of the Mountain is free to go," I said. "He waits only to rejoice in the complete consummation of our happiness."

"He waits to rejoice?" said Geipgos.

"In the glorious fulfillment of our happiness, yes."

It was the wisest thing I could have said, for primitives everywhere are natural-born feast makers. Rejoicing in the happiness of the newly-wed is second nature to them.

I could see that Geipgos was impressed. He raised his arm, and gestured to the warriors. Still scowling, but without hesitation, they strode past us, grouped themselves about the net and started prodding the lizard with their spears. Gently, firmly, and with great deference.

Suddenly the startled creature gave a shrill scream, swung about, and began untangling itself. The warriors leapt back in awe, lowered their spears, and waited to see what the Servant of the Mountain would do next.

It went right on screaming.

It was still screaming when it left the net like a bat out of a well. Straight across the clearing it soared and into the trees, missing Geipgos by a scant twelve inches.

What it did was perfectly natural under the circumstances, but its effect on Geipgos was tantamount to the lightning conversion of a miracle enacted for his benefit alone. He swung toward me, utter self-castigation in his eyes.

The Servant of the Mountain had been wiser than Geipgos. It had stayed until prodded, indicat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing a desire to stay. Amends must be made for the doubting of a friend. The female, my mate, must be the guest of Geipgos.

Kallatah stared at me with a wild surmise. "What did you tell him?" she asked. "What did he *say* to you?"

"We're to go to their village," I told her. "We're to go as honored guests."

At a command from Geipgos a litter sixteen feet square was set down before us, and we got into it. Four tall warriors grouped themselves with prideful eagerness about the conveyance, and lifted it to their shoulders. Geipgos and his son fell back with gestures of deep respect, and a procession formed behind us, and we were borne forward across the clearing like the idols of some primitive fertility cult whose wrath could shrivel crops and cause a blight to descend upon the land.

Amidst shouts of jubilation and an incredible bowing and scraping we were borne swiftly along a jungle trail between towering walls of vegetation. And then out on a sloping mountainside which overlooked a valley swimming in a deep, golden haze.

The trail descended the mountain in a corkscrew curve, with many evil-looking twists and turns. To be carried on a litter down a steep trail is always hazardous and I would have preferred to remain silent. But when I saw how alarmed Kallatah looked I thought it best to keep right on talking.

Across the valley loomed the largest volcano on Dragona and as I gestured toward it I did my best to sound cheerful.

"That mountain has our friends worried," I said. "It's been rumbling off and on for weeks. You've got to remember that to a primitive a fire mountain is just about the most terrifying object in nature. Why do you think those lizards are taboo animals?"

I laid my hand on her arm. "An accident of nature, nothing more. The lizards live just inside the crater, high up where the heat can't harm them. Naturally they've become identified with the volcano. To Geipgos and his warriors the ugly-looking beasts are Servants of the Mountain who can stay its wrath. Capture them, abuse them, and the wrath of the mountain will be unleashed in all its fury. The pattern is a primitive one, but completely logical from their point of view."

Kallatah looked at me steadily for a moment. "It almost became a pattern of death for us," she said.

"I know," I said. "But don't forget it's an ugly pattern for them too. A pattern of never-ceasing terror, of semi-starvation."

One of the warriors thrust his face close to us to ask if we were all right. I nodded, and he fell back with a gratified grin to re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sume his position in the procession.

"It's tragic how one little taboo can hold a race back," I went on. "You've seen how keenly intelligent they are. If that taboo hadn't plagued them for hundreds of years they'd be truly civilized by now."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Kallatah said. "What do you mean by a pattern of starvation."

"Those lizards eat the natives out of house and home," I told her. "Literally—and it's horrible. When we come to the village you'll see what emaciated skeletons the women and children are. The lizards are so sacred they can't be killed off without angering the mountain."

It was then that Kallatah surprised me. She gave a low whistle.

"You mean that tribal law has decreed that?"

"Precisely. They breed fast and eat voraciously. You can't have agriculture and the storage of fruits and grains—any kind of stable handicraft culture even—with vicious tyrants like that on every patch of cultivated land. By rough estimate those beasts consume millions of tons of food a year. Even the small animal life is vanishing."

"And they don't dare kill one," Kallatah said. "It sounds insane."

"All primitive fear taboos are insane," I told her. "They're symptoms of the stark lunacy which possesses the human mind before it gets hold of the tools it needs to grasp the real nature of the physical world. Even when it gets such tools," I qualified, "a society can be psychotic in a more complex way. All societies are probably psychotic in one way or the other, but that's another story entirely."

"But the adult males seem well fed," Kallatah said, her eyes on the trail ahead. "How could starved children grow up into such robust-looking adults?"

"Deprivation has left its marks," I told her. "You've got to remember that only the strongest survive where the infant mortality skyrockets the way it does here. And those that do reach manhood have bad teeth, poor digestion—all kinds of psychosomatic ills. What you are seeing here is the warrior caste strutting its might. A warrior caste will *always* find a way to eat."

She didn't speak again until we were at the base of the mountain, and the village was coming swiftly toward us through the haze.

"You still haven't told me how you managed to turn aside their wrath," she complained. "Just what did you say to them? Why are they bringing us here? Did you expect me to understand the gibberish you used?"

Dared I be completely honest? I decided it would be tempting fate to tell her exactly what I had said to Geipgos. She'd find out soon enough. Meanwhile, I needed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time to plan my strategy and come up with something workable that wouldn't make her hate me too much.

The sudden appearance of the children saved the moment for me, sparing me the necessity of further evasion. They were playing on the plain directly in front of the village, racing to and fro with the eager abandonment of all children everywhere.

They used their five arms to good advantage, tossing mud cakes at one another, blinking and grimacing with a demoniac expressiveness, pretending to be dead from famine one instant, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, coming exuberantly to life again.

For an instant Kallatah's face radiated only maternal solicitude, a gentle sweetness untouched by rancor. Then, all at once, she seemed to realize how emaciated they were, how completely different from ordinary children. Her head came up, and her eyes blazed with indignation.

The blaze grew hotter as the lizards added fuel to it. The revolting creatures were everywhere—on slanting mud banks lush with berry-laden vegetation, on fields that sloped away to mist-filled hollows, even within easy pouncing distance of the children.

They ignored us as we were borne past, their carrion-repulsive heads bobbing to and fro. They were devouring everything edible within reach of their forepaws, swaying back and forth and cramming the food into their mouths with a voracity which was sickening to watch.

Miraculously the children ignored them, and went right on playing.

The procession moved on in silence, straight toward a picture of human misery so tragic and pitiful that no man of good will could have contemplated it without a shudder.

The village consisted of twenty-five or thirty huts, each with its central supporting pole, and spreading straw roof. The women sat about listless and sullen in doorways, apparently not caring at all how unattractive they looked, or what a disillusioning impression their complete lack of amorous allure must have made on the returning, better-nourished warriors.

But there is something about the imminent prospect of a nuptial ceremony that infuses joy into even the most dispirited, and the instant they saw us they leapt up with one accord and came flocking around us. Old and young, tall and short, comely and ugly.

The warriors carried us to the central hut and set the litter down with prideful flourishes of their long arms and broad, straight shoulders. Instantly shouts of jubilation echoed through the village. There were no brass bands, but the brass band spirit was tremendously in evidence.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A child of ten came up, bearing garlands, and a girl with skeleton ribs, and vermilion-painted cheek-bones presented Kallatah with a beautiful shell bracelet mottled yellow and black, slipping it on her wrist before she could recoil in protest.

She was still protesting when we were ushered into the hut, Geipgos grinning and bowing and his son standing straight and still and with a smirk of anticipatory amorousness in the midst of the women.

"Geega Drun Fra Hul," Geipgos said. That translated out as: "We will leave you now. Later we will rejoice together in the great joy which has overtaken you. Ah, that I could be as young as you are on such a night as this."

The din outside continued for a moment and then gradually subsided.

We looked at each other.

Night was already descending over the clearing. It falls fast on Dracona—a blanket of impenetrable darkness settling down. Just by craning our necks we could look out into the clearing and see the last glimmer of dusk departing. A star appeared in the sky as if by magic, but we just sat there exchanging meaningful glances, Kallatah's face shadowed and curiously withdrawn.

Suddenly she spoke. "You didn't fool me for a minute."

"Fool you?" I said slowly. "I'm afraid I don't undertand."

"Oh, you understand, all right. You're very clever—*or think you are.*"

"I wasn't trying to be clever," I told her. "It looked pretty bad for us. They would have killed us both if I hadn't talked them out of it."

"You could have told me!" she flung at me, her eyes abruptly accusing. "Why did you have to make a secret of it?"

"A secret of what?"

"You didn't think I'd guess straight off? You didn't give me credit for knowing even that much about the psychology of primitives?"

"You're talking in riddles," I protested. "You're taking too much for granted."

"Am I? The things *you* take for granted are beyond belief. I know exactly how your mind worked. You told yourself they were angry enough to kill impulsively. You had to give them the strongest possible reason for *not* wanting to kill us. Isn't that so?"

"Well—"

"There's a very old saying that has a universal application," she said, a stinging contempt in her voice. "All the world loves a lover. I thought of it instantly myself."

"You did? If I had known—"

"Keep quiet and let me finish. You told them that I was *your woman.* You probably added that the whole ridiculous insanity was recent enough to be celebrated right here in their own village.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Naturally that did it. Whisper the words 'nuptial ceremony' to a primitive and you've transferred to him an inward glow that makes him your friend forever.

"If he's old he remembers what it meant when it happened to him. If he's young there's the rapture of anticipation. Besides, primitives like display and drama, human giggling and embarrassment just as much as you do. You of Earth still throw rice, you know. We have passed beyond such foolishness, but there are times—"

She looked at me and giggled. It was the cruelest thing she could have done because, despite the giggle, there was a cold mockery in her stare that castigated my Earthborn heritage and made me feel ridiculous.

It was then that she *really* threw the book at me. "Instead of discussing the whole matter as an anthropological problem that could only have been solved by analyzing it in a calmly scientific and detached way you acted as if you thought me capable of making an embarrassing situation out of it."

She stood up abruptly, removing the binding circlet from her hair, and shaking her head until the freed tresses descended in a tumbled red-gold mass to her shoulders.

"Prudishness is both barbaric and childish," she said. "It has nothing to do with modesty and reserve, which are admirable when a man and a woman do not know one another well enough to feel at ease in an atmosphere of mutual respect and admiration."

There was a heavy silence for an instant. Then very calmly and deliberately she took off her weather jacket, folded it, and laid it on the floor at her feet.

"It will do for a pillow," she said. "I hate sleeping without a support for my head."

I stared automatically at her bare shoulders, the way I might have stared if a blinding vision of paradise had appeared to me between sleeping and waking and vanished in a flash.

"What makes all this so amusing is the way it parallels a good many of the farcical situations in the ancient folk writings of Terra," she said. "I've made a comparative study of them, and they really are precious."

The precise set of her waistline seemed to annoy her, and she changed it perceptibly, loosening the binding straps until I caught the barest glimmer of white between them. She stared at me with patronizing pity, as if my startlement was tantamount to a further step downward into the murk of a prudishness so childish that it branded me as a barbarian without a single redeeming trait.

She stared through and beyond me, her eyes stabbing the shadows, her voice derisive in its composure. "For some reason a man has to pretend that a woman is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his wife. There's a wealthy relative to impress, or a primitive conveyance breaks down, and a thunderstorm compels the pair to take refuge in a wayside dwelling.

"There is only one sleeping compartment available and what do you suppose the man does? The sane scientific approach would be to behave like an intelligent human being. When a man and a woman are alone together excessive prudishness is ridiculous. Why with such a charming companion available should he not relax as I am doing—be completely natural and human and at his ease? Why should he not sit down and discuss art and philosophy, music and the dance the whole night through?

"But does he—in the ancient folk writings? No. The silly fool gets up, takes a blanket and creeps out into the night. He shivers in the cold for no reason at all. Owls hoot at him, but he still persists in making himself ridiculous until the dawn comes up."

I looked at her for a long moment in silence. It has never been difficult for me to take a hint. I knew, of course, that women have a remarkable capacity for burying their real feelings beneath a dozen or more carefully arranged masks for the sole purpose of keeping a man guessing. But I decided not to even attempt to peel off the masks. It would have been too dangerously time-consuming.

Fortunately I was wearing heavy enough spaceleather to protect me from the cold. I wouldn't need a blanket, and there were no owls on Dracona to hoot at me.

"I'm afraid I'm still too much of a primitive to find our ancient folk writings amusing," I told her.

Without another word, ignoring her abrupt, startled gasp, I swung about and went striding out of the hut into the cool night.

I slowed my stride the instant I found myself alone under the stars. So far I'd gained a respite. But I knew that what remained to be done could backfire and destroy me. She'd stepped into a situation more complicated than any we could have planned together. Nature had set the stage for it before her arrival, and the performance was about to begin. If the first act went wrong the music might well become a dirge, and the final curtain descend on a funeral landscape as bleak as a fire-ravaged tinder box.

A half mile from the village there was a hill where I could get a clear view of the volcano, and the cloud that hung poised above it night and day, its peculiar configuration giving it the aspect of a gigantic black moth flailing the air with soot-encrusted wings. For centuries that cloud had hung there, and would probably remain until the volcano burnt itself out.

I skirted the shadows until I was clear of the village and then I walked with my shoulders

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

squared until I reached the hill. On Dracona a man must walk boldly if he is to walk at all.

It was cold on the hill—chillingly bleak and depressing. But I knew that my spaceleather would keep me warm enough. Thinking of Kallatah's violet eyes and the incredible glints of gold in her hair I threw myself down and lay stretched out at full length in the velvety darkness.

My eyes were on the cloud when the strange, startling play of colors began. First a flash of red on the underside of the cloud, and then a flash of dazzling violet piercing the cloud. Red, violet, and then red again—each color lingering for perhaps ten seconds.

I took out my instruments then, and made a careful check. My equipment consisted of a tiny electro-magnetic linear strain seismograph which was sensitive to a tremor as faint as one ten-billionth of an inch, and a vertical recorder which gave me a picture in two dimensions of the surface tension at the edge of the crater ten thousand times enlarged.

I watched the cloud and studied the instruments, waiting until I was completely sure. Then I arose, brushed the dirt from my knees, returned the instruments to their cases, and started back down the hill.

When I reached the village there was no stir of movement anywhere. I did not trade on my luck by pausing to explore the shadows. I went straight to Geipgos' hut, pushed the boughs aside, and crept inside on my hands and knees.

Geipgos was sleeping on a couch of matted vines with his arms interlocked on his chest, the green sheen of his skin, and the prominence of his cheekbones giving him an eerily mummified aspect.

I knelt at his side, got out the little reflector and strapped it to my forehead. I had to pause an instant to control the trembling of my hands.

The light came on in a sudden, blinding glare. I was hardly aware that I had switched it on until I found myself staring directly into Geipgos' startled eyes.

To get anywhere with hypnosis you've got to start fast. I looked Geipgos straight in the eye, passing my hand swiftly back and forth before his face, giving him no chance to realize that he was no longer asleep. The abrupt, almost intolerable glare was my greatest immediate asset.

"Yon Honi Erun," I whispered. "The Servants of the Mountain are very evil."

Geipgos blinked furiously, and his eyes widened in stark, incredulous terror.

I went on quickly: "You have always known them to be wicked—monstrously wicked and hateful. How repulsive they are in appearance alone, with their long

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scaly bodies so like the bodies of the shadow monsters which you feared would tear you piecemeal when as a child you disobeyed your parents.

"Do you not remember how you ran screaming from your father's wrath and hid in the dark, wishing that you might be a man grown, mighty in your contempt and defiance? You have always known the Servants of the Mountain to be hateful. But in your great fear you dared not say to yourself: 'They have brought me nothing but disaster!'"

Geipgos groaned and his eyes rolled.

"You dared not say," I went on relentlessly, "what you knew in your heart to be true. You dared not say: 'The Servants of the Mountain are false servants. They have brought my *people* nothing but disaster! When a man is hungry must he starve? Must the fruits of his labor, the harvest that he has sown not only for himself alone, but for the adored ones of his heart be snatched from him?"

Geipgos' eyes took on a strange glaze and his lips began to tremble.

"Soon the sky will be red," I told him. "Soon the ground will shake. Soon the wrath of the mountain will be terrible against its false servants."

Geipgos tried to rise, but I gripped his arm and compelled him to keep his eyes riveted on the reflector. "They are not true servants, for they anger the mountain. The mountain would drive them forth, but without your help how can the mountain free itself? The mountain has no legs. It cannot walk about and seek out its false servants when they descend on the village."

For the first time in Geipgos' life a deeply buried part of his mind was stirring tumultuously. I could tell by the way he gnashed his teeth, and swung his five arms about that he was raging inwardly.

You cannot hypnotize a man against his will. You can not force him to do something that will outrage his moral sense. But what I wanted Geipgos to do had the sanction of nature and common sense, and the sanction as well of the wild, unruly part of himself that has shaped his destiny from childhood. I was playing both ends off against the middle—against a ridiculous straw man of a hated taboo.

"When you have done what you must do the mountain will cease to be angry," I told him. "It will rejoice with you."

Then I told him what had to be done. I implanted the command with as much majesty as I could summon, dimming the reflector with my palm so that he could see me clearly.

"The mountain will rejoice with you," I repeated. "The sky will cease to be red. The ground will cease to tremble."

I left him then. I left him and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hugged the shadows, moving stealthily from hut to hut. Into thirty huts I crept and roused the sleeping warriors with the same hypnotic dazzlement. And to each I whispered the same words, and imposed upon them the same urgent post-hypnotic command.

It is always unwise to take pride in a difficult task accomplished with ease until the last obstacle has been overcome, the last hurdle surmounted.

I almost did—until I walked through the high-arching entrance of the thirty-first hut, and found myself confronting a warrior wide awake and on his feet.

"I have been awaiting your coming," Geipgos' son said.

Our Earth heritage is rich in legends. The great poets, the myth-makers, have all paid homage to the shining strength, the courage and daring which sets a king's son apart from ordinary mortals.

And the king's son came in his wrath and smote them. Terrible was he in battle, shod in fire and fury, rallying the vanguished with his might.

I had never believed it. But I *was* startled and must have shown it, for into Slagoon's eyes came a look of mocking triumph.

"Gru Huhu Frum," he said. "I followed you when you left the village. I watched you making magic on the hill."

"It was not magic, son of Geipgos," I said. "I was talking to the mountain. Would you doubt the word of a guest?"

"I would doubt the word of a guest who does not speak the truth."

There was no need for further speech between us.

I measured him with my eyes, the length and breadth and thickness of him. He had kept himself in fine physical trim, despite the demon of hunger which must have dogged his footsteps night and day. A lean panther is more dangerous than a well-fed one; a man with gaunt cheeks and protruding ribs a treacherous adversary if his muscles have retained their resiliency, and the will to wrestle and slay is strong in him.

He had five hands to my two. He was armed and I was weaponless and his weapon was a cruel one, a curving blade with a bone handle, ground to a deadly sharpness.

When you're girding for a life-and-death struggle it's best to whittle your adversary down to size. I told myself that I was a civilized man with a resolution he could never hope to match. He would fight like a savage, granted. But I was sure that two hands guided by a trained intelligence could grip and hold, twist and bend twice as well as five hands animated by a blind urge to kill.

I squared my shoulders and started walking straight toward him. I was encouraged by the way

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he returned my stare, as if the look of confidence in my eyes had planted a sudden, disturbing doubt in his mind. It was enough to assure me that if I kept my head and closed in relentlessly my chances would be good.

I gave him no opportunity to strike at me with his mind. I advanced to within six feet of him, and maneuvered myself into a crouching position with a grimace so scornful that his eyes remained riveted on my face.

I came up out of the crouch like a coiled spring unwinding. With shattering violence I hurled myself against him, bone against bone, solid cartilage against hard gristle. He let out a yell, and went careening backwards like a feather in the path of a hurricane.

Subconsciously I must have expected him to crack his skull against the baked-mud wall of the hut, and flatten out at my feet. Otherwise why was my next move so long delayed? He must have gotten at my mind a little, for I stood like a man bemused while he hit the wall, twisted about, and came swinging back toward me, his eyes filmed with pain and shock.

The lunge he made was so accurately gauged that the bone handle of the knife grazed my cheek. He was trading on his reflexes, the sure instinct of a primitive strong in battle, confident of his own strength. I leapt back, and sent my right fist crashing into his stomach. The blow staggered him, but not enough. With a deliberation unbelievable in one so hurt he slashed at me twice.

Just in time I ducked out of range, bent low and came up in a weaving crouch. I started hitting him, raining blows on his face and chest. I thought I heard his jaw crack, but as I whirled back to get a good look at him he laughed like an insane monkey, and transferred the knife to another hand.

He lunged again and I ducked again, and it went on in the same nightmare fashion until the knife was gleaming at the tip of an attenuated arm that followed my movements like a zigzagging lightning bolt.

He transferred the knife eight times, his laughter an insane echo as he weaved about. Desperately I dove for him and tried to knock the weapon away, but each time he was too quick for me.

His eyes burned with defiance and derision. But I suddenly saw that his mouth was beginning to sag, the lower lip trembling with unmistakable weakness.

I don't quite know how I got the knife away from him. But get it I did. I closed in suddenly, struck him a body blow that sent him reeling, followed him as he went backwards and wrested the weapon from him before he could recover his balance. I hit him again, and he went down, and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stood wrathfully over him.

He looked at me, his eyes filled with bewilderment and horror.

"Trag Unil Deguna," I said. "I've beaten you man to man in honest combat."

Suddenly his eyes widened, and all of the insane rage was gone from his face. "It is true," he whispered. "The Mountain must have given you his strength. How else could you have conquered the son of a Chief?"

"In no other way," I assured him.

"Does the Mountain now speak with your voice?"

"The Mountain is closer to me than it is to its false Servants," I told him.

I bent and gripped him by the shoulders. "You are young and strong," I said. "The son of a Chief. Only such a one can truly lead his people. If when the Mountain speaks and the sky becomes red you leap straightway into battle at your father's side against the false Servants I will spare your life."

He sat up and rubbed his chin. His eyes were still awestruck, and I was confident that if the mountain itself had entered the hut, and spoken to him he would scarcely have been more eager to obey.

"I will do as the Mountain desires," he promised.

"You will not have long to wait," I assured him. "Soon the wrath of the Mountain will be terrible against its false servants. Sit here quietly and be patient. You will see."

It was almost dawn when I returned to the central hut. I walked in boldly like a man coming home a little later than usual with some tremendous bright surprise for his wife that would take the curse off his lateness.

Kallatah was asleep with her weather jacket rolled up under her head, a look of almost childlike innocence on her face. She looked so beautiful that I was afraid if I knelt and kissed her she'd shatter and fly apart like one of those ancient statues that have lain for centuries in the buried past of the Earth.

There was no need for me to wake her. The rumbling did it. It started far off, and came slowly nearer, sweeping down upon the hut like the drums of primitive warfare beating at first in ominous undertones and then ever more loudly as they converged upon their mark.

The drums were nature's own, and they were beating deep within the ground. With the beating came a heaving and a quaking, and right where I was standing a jagged rent appeared suddenly in the dried red clay which had been baked by Geipgos himself to line the floor of his hut.

I had timed the eruption with the sure instinct of a trained scientist who knows just how to fill in the gaps left by the hair-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trigger measurements of precision instruments with an intuitive sixth-sense. It could have occurred an hour sooner or an hour later, but I wasn't surprised that it occurred when it did.

Only Kallatah was surprised. She awoke with the first quake and looked up at me. Her eyes grew wide and startled, and suddenly she was on her feet, clinging to my arm and screaming.

I shook her until she grew quiet, then drew her to the hut's swaying entrance and pointed out into the flame-streaked shadows. Flashes of light were converging on the village from all directions, cascading over the thatched roofs with their central supporting poles, sending women and children scrambling frenziedly into the open.

"The volcano's in full eruption!" I whispered.

"How can you stand there so calmly?" Her face was white. "If a quake opens a fissure at our feet—"

"We'll never know a moment's pain," I said. "It's the one great danger. The lava flow won't reach the village."

"How do you know?"

"I used some very sensitive instruments to measure the banked up lava flow and the intensity of the central fires with a minimal margin of error," I said. "I knew almost precisely to the hour when the eruption would occur. It's a fairly severe eruption, but not a major one."

"You knew—"

"It's been building up for days. It should be over in an hour."

She started to reply, then swayed toward me in blind panic.

It wasn't a stampede exactly. The lizards didn't emerge from the shadows in a single onrushing column, but in threes and fours. Maddened with terror they darted to and fro between the cowering, screaming women and children, their distended eyes and metallic body sheen mirroring the fiery sky glow.

They lunged and parried, striking out with their claws as they circled about as any savage animal will when it feels itself to be hopelessly trapped. There was a blind purposelessness in their movements, a frantic swaying and thumping that churned up the ground beneath them and sent clumps of uprooted vegetation spinning in all directions.

The sky glow became more fiery, spilling over in crimson splotches, turning the village thatch poles into redly glowing fingers pointing mountainward as if in remorseless accusation. The rumblings grew louder, the quakes more frequent.

A woman ran into the open with a child in her arms. She set the child down with a look of calm, tender solicitude on her face, picked up a rock and hurled it at a lizard. Other women joined

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her, clustering about her as if to draw strength from that straight unbending figure. The lizards veered away from her, and she stood with the infant in her arms again, a picture of quiet heroism.

Kallatah's eyes were shining. She seemed to have lost her fear, and suddenly she too was joining in the attack on the lizards. She picked up a stone and hurled it, and her laughter rang out defiantly above the screams of the natives.

More lizards appeared, creating such panic that a few of the women ran shrieking back into their huts again. The sky had become a solid sheet of flame, and every hut in the village was writhing in fiery radiance.

There was a continuous loud scrambling and flapping noise as the lizards tried in vain to take flight. Something had crippled and imprisoned them in the flame-streaked region between the huts and they were powerless to escape from it.

I didn't know exactly what was going to happen. I wasn't sure just how the first destructive assault would be made on the lizards, whether the mental tensions would increase first, or the physical ones shatter the beasts with a sudden, explosive violence.

With poltergeists you can never be sure. The powerful waves of their thoughts and emotions sweep through their minds in erratic currents, and when a post-hypnotic command enters the picture—

We didn't have long to wait. With a shrill scream one of the lizards leapt high into the air and was slammed back against a tree, so violently that it sagged to the ground without a single convulsive quiver of expiring life. A fire broke out where it lay, danced and flickered about it. Another lizard was lifted high into the air, and sent spinning with a terrible spasmodic contraction of its entire bulk.

The scramblings of the other lizards became more frantic, turned into a hideous twisting and squirming that sent chills coursing the length of my spine. Horribly one of the beasts exploded. Its chest was blown away as it reared on its hindlimbs, and was carried backwards by a whirling spiral of flame. Others were ripped apart as if by invisible talons, flattened out, crushed and shredded into fragments.

We saw the warriors then. Straight into the village clearing they strode, Geipgos at their head and his son Slagoon walking proudly at his side. They were flourishing their spears and shouting, and the sky glow was bright on their green-bronze shoulders, and was mirrored in their eyes.

I had been right in my prediction. In less than an hour the rumblings ceased and the ground stopped trembling. The fieriness vanished from the sky. But for three days the warriors pursued

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the lizards across the crater's rim, descending into the smoke-filled clefts where for centuries they had nested and multiplied, routing and shattering them until Dracona was cleansed and a brave new dawn broke over Geipgos' unbowed head.

I stood with Kallatah on a cloud-wreathed peak staring down.

"When man is free to shape his own destiny," I said, "civilization does not beat its shining wings in vain. They will go forward boldly now, with the yoke of superstition forever removed from their necks."

"Thanks to you," Kallatah said.

"It was not too difficult to predict the exact moment of the volcano's eruption," I said. "As for the post-hypnotic command—you could have done that too."

Kallatah turned and looked at me, her eyes strangely luminous. "Taro Hargon," she said. "I am going to tell you something. From the first moment I saw you I knew that you were a *man*."

I stared at her, wondering.

"It takes the courage and daring and resourcefulness of the Earthborn to do what you did. The Guiding Council realized that we on Tragor had need of the Earthborn too. Our heritage had worn too thin. So they selected a man of Terra with truly great gifts of body and mind to guide us all—"

I grew alarmed, still wondering how insecure my secret had become.

"Oh, you returned for a lark. Took to wandering again, as an Earthborn trader. For an hour and a day."

She laughed and her hands were suddenly busy at the flaps of my weather jacket, peeling them back to bring the shining insignia into view.

"Supreme Councillor and Guide," she whispered. "I knew it from the first."

"You knew—"

"Oh, my darling, yes. I guessed, I knew. In the hushed great halls the footsteps of a man like you were solely needed. The Guiding Council had vision and strength too—the courage to break through all taboos and seek the one right man for a task no other man could do.

"Naturally you are human still. In my presence you felt at first a certain shyness. I could see that you were searching inwardly for flaws that might have made you seem unworthy in my eyes. It was a boyish, foolish trait—and from that moment I loved you with all my heart. To be great and doubt one's greatness is the surest path to a woman's heart."

I reached out and took her into my arms. "No man is a safe guide when he walks alone," I said. "It is time that the Councillor took a wife."

"Yes," she agreed. "It is time."

There was silence on the peak as we stared down together into the shining valley far below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the nobles are coming

by . . . Gene Cross

Together they discussed the Nobles — the old prospector and the weary, frightened man. Then — utter terror struck!

I RESTED on reaching what seemed to be the top of the incline, and leaned back against the wall of the cave. For a moment the silence was unbroken. And then in the darkness there was a whisper of movement, an unseen stirring that was stilled by my involuntary, voiceless cry, *"What's there!"*

With only a blurred memory of having reached for it, I found my gun in my hand.

"Don't shoot!" said a burry voice. "Allow me to introduce myself: Mister J. J. Abrogado, A-b-r-o-g-a-d-o, Serbo-Croat prospector, at your service!"

I lowered the gun hesitantly, letting it waver in the general direction from which the voice came. It was a strange introduction, but the possessor of the voice must have been as frightened by my bursting suddenly into the cave as I had been on finding it already occupied.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"That's supposed to be my question," said Mister J. J. Abrogado. "Who are you? And

When science fiction clasps hands with the horror story, pure and unadulterated, it's well to make certain you're being guided toward the abyss by competent hands. Gene Cross has the rare gift of lighting up his somber, ghoul-haunted woodlands by flashes of chilling lightning. By suggesting more than he tells he evokes the absolute ultimate in shuddery terror without venturing for a single moment beyond the rust-red hills of Mars.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what was it that frightened you?"

"Sorry," I apologized. "My name's Ross. I'm an archeologist. I was on a trip alone in my ground car when it broke down. Being no mechanic, I couldn't fix it. I decided to walk back to Marsport. I walked all day and most of this night, when—Well, listen!"

I bent my head to one side. Through the earphones of my headwarmer I could hear from far away a vague presentiment of movement, a dim blur upon the horizon of sound.

"The nightrunners," said Abrogado in recognition. "I thought it might have been something else that frightened you." There was an unspoken question in his silence.

"What?" I asked, wondering.

The cave was like a bottle of blackness. I could see nothing of my companion, not even his head and shoulders which must have been thrust rather sharply forward.

"The Nobles," said the prospector. "I thought perhaps you had seen a Noble."

The presentiment of movement had become a distant murmur, and my hand against the cave wall could detect a soft, smooth trembling.

"No, I didn't see a Noble," I answered. "In fact, I've never seen a Noble."

"Nor I," said J. J. Abrogado.

There was silence again. It lasted for long minutes. There was nothing in my universe but the solidity of cave wall and floor; and—in the background—the growing murmur of the nightrunners.

"I've seen a man who saw a Noble, though," I said at last. "What was left of him they brought into the base hospital at Marsport on a rubber blanket, and placed in a tub. Nothing was missing, but he was peeled."

I might just as well have said 'shelled' or 'husked', as if something had tried to turn him inside out.

The murmur was now the sound of a rising tide.

The man I had seen in the tub had been one of the few "missing men" who had been found. The others had never been seen again. They had been archeologists, exploring isolated Martian ruins or prospectors, seeking precious metals . . .

As if aware of my thoughts, Abrogado said: "Most of the missing were prospectors. I'm a prospector."

Instantly I regretted having contributed anything about Nobles to the conversation. I remembered all the stories I had ever heard about Martian prospectors gone mad. And here was one seemingly obsessed with the fear of falling into the two-fingered hands of the strange creatures from outer space.

My eyes were as accustomed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

now to the blackness as they would ever be, and still I could see virtually nothing of my companion —except for a slight lessening of the darkness mirrored in his eyes occasionally. But that lessening gave me two items of information: He was about my height and he was looking directly at me.

"The Nobles," said Abrogado in his toneless voice. "Man knows almost nothing of them, as they can stop their hearts at will, and so are never captured alive.

"We can only be sure that they are stately, regal creatures, fifteen feet high who walk always with grace and dignity. Proud, sensitive, steeped in tradition—that is the impression one gains of them. But it's hard to understand how such remote, godlike beings whose lives should be devoted to beauty remain continually preoccupied with death.

"But then, standards vary, and what Earthman can say what is truly beautiful, what is truly ugly? Perhaps the Nobles evoke strange and somber rhythms from human diaphragms, play great symphonies of attenuated delight upon the nerves of living creatures."

Whatever else Abrogado had to say was submerged in a great flood of sound. Outside, a hundred thousand ostrich-like creatures were racing madly through the night, their thick legs drumming against the desert sands. The cave was filled with the echoing thunder of their passing.

If it hadn't been for them I would have flung myself out of the cave to avoid sharing for another moment the company of the mad prospector. But nothing could stand before the impact of that terrible explosive migration, which had mystified zoologists for so many years.

Actually, I was being needlessly alarmed. After all, I was armed. What did I have to fear from a moonstruck old man? Nevertheless, I had an uneasy picture of him standing near, waiting for the turmoil to subside, his face gaunt and shadowed by a heavy beard. For once I wished I had the Noble's ability to see in the dark.

Minutes passed while the drumming drained slowly away.

"I'm glad that's over," said Abrogado. "I have some questions to ask you. I have been isolated in the desert for many months. You are the first human I have seen for a long while."

"Go ahead," I said, absently.

I was wondering just how the missing prospectors had been trapped. I pictured Nobles crouching in a cave, waiting for one of the poor devils to enter. But that wasn't likely. Their bodies were formed of large cartilage-like sections which were too rigid to permit them to crouch or kneel. Physiologically, they had but two choices: to draw themselves up to their full height

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of fifteen feet, or to lie flat upon the ground.

In reply to Abrogado's questions, I chatted lightly about the new shops and homes, and the population figures as shown in the latest census of Marsport.

Abrogado asked: "Have you seen the new interstellar ship?" *"The Stellar Missile?"* I nodded; "Yes, I've seen it. They're still putting the finishing touches on it—painting, insulating, and so on."

The existence of the great ship, long under secret construction, had just been revealed to the populaces of the Inner Worlds. It was being constructed on Mars as it would be easier to lift from the red planet than from Earth. The nose of *The Stellar Missile* was pointed outward in the general, but specifically unknown, direction of the home planet of the Nobles.

"What star is it investigating first?" asked Abrogado.

"Oh, a very likely star," I said, "considering the evidence. Sirius."

"So it is Mira?" mused the other. "I know little of astronomy, but it doesn't seem a likely star to me."

I touched the open face of my watch, feeling the hands. I knew that in a few minutes it would be —not dawn, but daylight. Because of its light atmospheric envelope there is no true twilight, or dawn on Mars. The sun just suddenly waxes into brightness in about the same length of time as it takes the glow in a television tube to wane into darkness. And so, in a few minutes, I would see my companion for the first time.

"I have an idea," I said, "as to how we can deal with the Nobles when we find them."

"Yes?" asked Abrogado.

"Mind if I sit down?" I asked. I loosened my harness, unbuckled my belt. "Have you heard of J-bombs?" I said, and dropped.

Before I struck the floor my gun-weighted hand had leapt out, and the silence was shredded by a staccato blast of sound. I jackknifed upwards, holding the trigger tight against the butt emptying destruction into the night with desperate haste.

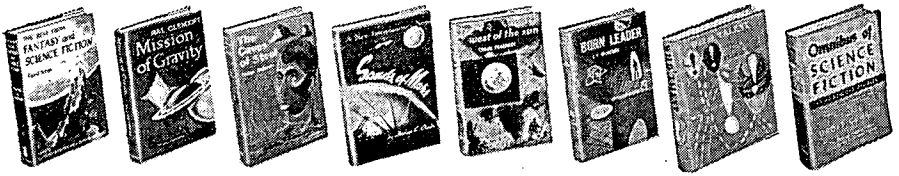
My gun brought its stuttered sentence to a halt and, as if a period were being added by the pen of chance, there was the metallic punctuation of a heavy object dropping to the ground.

Then, miraculously, the interior of the cave brimmed with radiance, and objects stood out in stark relief. There was a glint of brightness on metal: A gun of strange design lay directly before me.

And above me the explosion-pocked body of a Noble hung suspended from the ceiling by suction-cupped feet. It dripped blue blood upon the rocky floor, its eyes vacantly staring.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes! Any 3 of These Top Science-Fiction Thrillers Yours for Only $1.00 WITH MEMBERSHIP



—Continued from Back Cover

THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION — See description on back cover.

THE CAVES OF STEEL, *by Isaac Asimov* — Robots are the most hated creatures on earth. Then a noted robot scientist is murdered. Detective Baley has to track down the killer. And — *he's given a robot as a partner!*

SANDS OF MARS, *by Arthur C. Clarke* — You're the first Earth-Man to rocket crash onto the wild Martian desert — the first to track down the strange footprints in the sand and find yourself face-to-face with — a living MARTIAN!

WEST OF THE SUN, *by Edgar Pangborn* — Imagine yourself one of this small band of 21st Century scientists . . . four men and two girls . . . "shipwrecked" on an unknown planet *billions* of miles from Earth! You find yourself in a strange new world that must now be your home planet FOREVER!

BORN LEADER, *by J. T. McIntosh* — The strange story of the last rocket ship to leave doomed Earth — and the would-be dictator who couldn't find the people he was trying to conquer!

WILD TALENT, *by Wilson Tucker* — Paul Breen was a one-man secret weapon! From his hide-out he could read the minds of enemy agents *anywhere! Then he got a brain* wave that he was about to be killed . . . by HIS OWN GOVERNMENT!

MISSION OF GRAVITY, *by Hal Clement* — Charles Lackland MUST explore the planet Mesklin. But the *force of gravity* there is so powerful the planet is squeezed almost flat — and a fall of even a few inches can *crush a human body to powder!*

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE-FICTION — 43 top stories by outstanding authors . . . stories of Wonders of Earth and Man . . . of startling inventions . . . of visitors from Outer Space . . . of Far Traveling . . . *Adventure in Dimension* . . . Worlds of Tomorrow. 562 pages.

SEND NO MONEY —JUST MAIL COUPON

We KNOW you will enjoy membership in this new book club. To PROVE it, we are making this amazing offer! Your choice of ANY 3 of the new Science-Fiction masterpieces — at ONLY $1 FOR ALL THREE. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. This liberal offer may have to be withdrawn at any time. So mail coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, Dept. FU-10, Garden City, New York.

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB

Dept FU-10, Garden City, New York

Please rush me the 3 books checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only $1 for all three (plus few cents shipping charges), and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming monthly selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus shipping. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member) — and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

SPECIAL NO RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing and this membership will be cancelled!

- ☐ **Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction**
- ☐ **Born Leader**
- ☐ **Caves of Steel**
- ☐ **Mission of Gravity**
- ☐ **Omnibus**
- ☐ **Sands of Mars**
- ☐ **West of the Sun**
- ☐ **Wild Talent**

Name.....
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

Selection price in Canada $1.10 plus shipping. Address Science-Fiction Club, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. (Offer good only in U. S. and Canada)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You are 25 million miles from Earth

—with no way of getting back!

SUPPOSE *you* were marooned on the moon without food or weapons! What you find there can make you the richest man on earth—if only you can GET BACK on earth! You'll thrill to this and many other adventures in a new, thrill-packed volume, THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION (3rd Series) — just one of the great new books included in this amazing offer!

ANY 3

of these Complete New Masterpieces of

SCIENCE-FICTION

Yours for Only $1.00

WITH MEMBERSHIP

IMAGINE — ANY THREE of these rocket-swift, jet-propelled SCIENCE-FICTION books — yours for only $1.00! Each one is crammed with science thrills of the future . . . packed with the imagination that will make tomorrow's headlines . . . written by the most sought-after science-fiction writers of today. A $7.50 to $9.00 value, complete and in handsome permanent bindings — but yours for only $1.00 on this amazing offer.

Now—The Cream of New Science-Fiction Books—For Only $1 Each!

We make this amazing offer to introduce you to the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB. The Club selects each month the best *and only the best new* Science-Fiction book. And to enable you to ENJOY the finest without worrying about the cost, the Club has arranged to bring you these brand-new full-length books FOR ONLY $1 EACH (plus a few cents shipping charge) — even though they cost $2.50, $2.75 and *up* in publishers' original editions!

Each selection is described WELL IN ADVANCE, in the Club's interesting free bulletin, "Things to Come." You take ONLY those books you really want — as few as four a year, if you wish. If you don't want the current selection, you notify the Club. There are no other rules, no dues, no fees.

See Other Side For Details

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED